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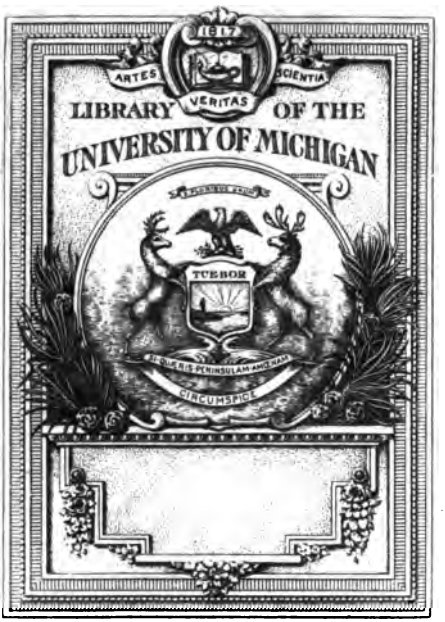

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THE CHILDREN OF THE KING

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THE

CHILDREN OF THE KING

A TALE OF SOUTHERN ITALY

BY

F. MARION CRAWFORD

AUTHOR OF 'MR. ISAACS,' 'DR. CLAUDIUS,' 'A ROMAN SINGER,' ETC.

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. I

London

MACMILLAN AND CO.

AND NEW YORK

1893

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DEDICATION

TO

THE MIDDY, THE LADDIE, THE MATE,

AND THE MEN,

THE SKIPPER OF THE OLD *LEONE*

DEDICATES

THIS STORY

151347

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CHAPTER I

LAY your course south-east half east from the Campanella. If the weather is what it should be in late summer you will have a fresh breeze on the starboard quarter from ten in the morning till four or five o'clock in the afternoon. Sail straight across the wide gulf of Salerno, and when you are over give the Licosa Point a wide berth, for the water is shallow and there are reefs along shore. Moreover there is no light on Licosa Point, and many a good ship has gone to pieces there in dark winter nights when the surf is

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rolling in. If the wind holds you may run on to Palinuro in a long day before the evening calm comes on, and the water turns oily and full of pink and green and violet streaks, and the sun settles down in the north-west. Then the big sails will hang like curtains from the long slanting yards, the slack sheets will dip down to the water, the rudder will knock softly against the stern-post as the gentle swell subsides. Then all is of a golden orange colour, then red as wine, then purple as grapes, then violet, then grey, then altogether shadowy as the stars come out—unless it chances that the moon is not yet full, and edges everything with silver on your left hand while the sunset dyes fade slowly to darkness upon your right.

Then the men forward will bestir themselves

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and presently a red glow rises and flickers and paints what it touches, with its own colours. The dry wood crackles and flares on the brick and mortar hearth, and the great kettle is put on. Presently the water boils—in go the long bundles of fine-drawn paste, and everybody collects forward to watch the important operation. Stir it quickly at first. Let it boil till a bit of it is tender under the teeth. In with the coarse salt, and stir again. Up with kettle. Chill it with a quart of cold water from the keg. A hand with the colander and one with the wooden spoon while the milky boiling water is drained off. Garlic and oil, or tomato preserve? Whichever it is, be quick about it. And so to supper, with huge hard biscuit and stony cheese, and the full wine jug passed from mouth to mouth. To every

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man a fork and to every man his place within arm's length of the great basin—mottled green and white within, red brown and unglazed on the outside. But the man at the helm has an earthen plate, and the jug is passed aft to him from time to time.

Not that he has much to do as he lies there on his six-foot deck that narrows away so sharply to the stern. He has taken a hitch round the heavy tiller with the slack of the main sheet to keep it off the side of his head while he eats. There is no current, and there is not a breath of air. By and by, before midnight, you will smell the soft land breeze blowing in puffs out of every little bay and indentation. There is no order needed. The men silently brace the yards and change the sheets over. The small jib is already bent in

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place of the big one, for the night is dark and some of those smart puffs will soon be like little squalls. Full and by. Hug the land, for there are no more reefs before Scalea. If you do not get aground on what you can see in Calabria, you will not get aground at all, says the old proverb. Briskly over two or three miles to the next point, and the breeze is gone again. While she is still forging ahead out go the sweeps, six or eight of them, and the men throw themselves forward over the long slender loom, as they stand. Half an hour to row, or more perhaps. Down helm, as you meet the next puff, and the good felucca heels over a little. And so through the night, the breeze freshening before the rising sun to die away in the first hot morning hours, just as you are abreast of Camerota. L'Infresco Point is

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ahead, not three miles away. It is of no use to row, for the breeze will come up before long and save you the trouble. But the sea is white and motionless. Far in the offing a Sicilian schooner and a couple of clumsy 'martinganes'—there is no proper English name for the craft—are lying becalmed, with hanging sails. The men on board the felucca watch them and the sea. There is a shadow on the white, hazy horizon, then a streak, then a broad dark blue band. The schooner braces her topsail yard and gets her main sheet aft. The martinganes flatten in their jibs along their high steeving bowsprits and jib-booms. Shift your sheets, too, now, for the wind is coming. Past L'Infresco with its lovely harbour of refuge, lonely as a bay in a desert island, its silent shade and its ancient spring. The wind is south by west at

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first, but it will go round in an hour or two, and before noon you will make Scalea—stand out for the reef, the only one in Calabria—with a stern breeze. You have passed the most beautiful spot on the beautiful Italian coast, without seeing it. There, between the island of Dino and the cape lies San Nicola, with its grand deserted tower, its mighty cliffs, its deep, safe bay and its velvet sand. What matter? The wind is fair and you are for Calabria with twenty tons of maccaroni from Amalfi. There is no time to be lost, either, for you will probably come home in ballast. Past Scalea, then where tradition says that Judas Iscariot was born and bred and did his first murder. Right ahead is the sharp point of the Diamante, beyond that low shore where the cane brake grows to within fifty yards of the sea

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Now you have run past the little cape, and are abreast of the beach. Down mainsail—down jib —down foresail. Let go the anchor while she forges, eight to nine lengths from the land, and let her swing round, stern to the sand. Clear away the dingy and launch her from amidships, and send a line ashore. Overboard with everything now, for beaching, capstan, chocks and all—the swell will wash them in. As the keel grates on the pebbles, the men jump into the water from the high stern and catch the drifting wood. Some plant the capstan, others pass the long hemp cable and reeve it through the fiddle block. A hand forward to slack out the cable as the heavy boat slowly creeps up out of the water. The men from other craft, already beached, lend a hand too and a score of stout fellows breast the long

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oars which serve for capstan bars. A little higher still. Now prop her securely and make all snug and ship-shape, and make fast the blade of an oar to one of the forward tholes, with the loom on the ground, for a ladder. You are safe in Calabria.

To-morrow at early dawn you must go into the hills, for you cannot sell a tenth of your cargo in the little village. Away you trudge on foot, across the rocky point, along the low flat beach by the cane brake, up the bed of the rivulet, where the wet green blades of the canes brush your face at every step. Shoes and stockings in hand, you ford the shallow river, then, shod again, you begin the long ascent. You will need four good hours, or five, for you are not a landsman, your shoes hurt you, and you would rather reef top-sails—aye, and take the lee earing, too, in any

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gale and a score of times, than breast that mountain. It cannot be helped. It is a hard life, though there are lazy days in the summer months, when the wind will do your work for you. You must live, and earn your share; though they call you the master, neither boat nor cargo are yours, and you have to earn that share by harder work and with greater anxiety than the rest. But the world is green to-day. You remember a certain night last March—off Cape Orso in the gulf, when the wind they call the Punti di Salerno was raging down and you had a jib bent for a mainsail, and your foresail close reefed and were shipping more green water than you like to think of. Pitch dark, too, and the little lighthouse on the cape not doing its best, as it seemed. The long line of the Salerno lights on

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the weather bow. No getting there, either, and no getting anywhere else apparently. Then you tried your luck. Amalfi might not be blowing. It was no joke to go about just then, but you managed it somehow, because you had half a dozen brave fellows with you. As she came up she was near missing stays and you sang out to let go the main halyards. The yard came down close by your head and nearly killed you, but she paid-off all right and went over on the starboard tack. Just under the cape the water was smooth. Just beyond it the devil was loose with all his angels, for Amalfi was blowing its own little hurricane on its own account from another quarter. Nothing for it but to go about and try Salerno again. What could you do in an open felucca with the green water running over? You did your best. Five

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hours out of that pitch black night you beat up, first trying one harbour and then the other. Amalfi gave in first, just as the waning moon rose, and you got under the breakwater at last.

You remember that last of your many narrow escapes to-day as you trudge up the stony mule-track through the green valleys, and it strikes you that after all it is easier to walk from Diamante all the way to Verbicaro, than to face a March storm in the gulf of Salerno in an open boat on a dark night. Up you go, past that strange ruin of the great Norman-Saracen castle standing alone on the steep little hill which rises out of the middle of the valley, commanding the roads on the right and the left. You have heard of the Saracens but not of the Normans. What kind of people lived there amongst those bristling ivy-

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grown towers? Thieves of course. Were they not Saracens and therefore Turks, according to your ethnology, and therefore brigands? It is odd that the government should have allowed them to build a castle just there. Perhaps they were stronger than the government. You have never heard of Count Roger, either, though you know the story of Judas Iscariot by heart as you have heard it told many a time in Scalea. Up you go, leaving the castle behind you, up to that square house they call the tower on the brow of the hill. It is a lonely road, a mere sheep track over the heights. You are over it at last, and that is Verbicaro, over there on the other side of the great valley, perched against the mountain side, a rough, grey mass of red-roofed houses cropping up like red-tipped rocks out of a vast, sloping

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vineyard. And now there are people on the road, slender, barefooted, brown women in dark wine-coloured woollen skirts and scarlet cloth bodices much the worse for wear, treading lightly under half-a-quintal weight of grapes; well-to-do peasant men—galantuomini, they are all called in Calabria—driving laden mules before them, their dark blue jackets flung upon one shoulder, their white stockings remarkably white, their short home-spun breeches far from ragged, as a rule, but their queer little pointed hats mostly colourless and weather-beaten. Boys and girls, too, meet you and stare at you, or overtake you at a great pace and almost run past you, with an enquiring backward glance, each carrying something—mostly grapes or figs. Out at last, by the little chapel, upon what is the

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beginning of an inland carriage road — in a land where even the one-wheeled wheelbarrow has never been seen. The grass grows thick among the broken stones, and men and beasts have made a narrow beaten track along the extreme outside edge of the precipice. The new bridge which was standing in all its spick and span newness when you came last year, is a ruin now, washed away by the spring freshets. A glance tells you that the massive-looking piers were hollow, built of one thickness of stone, shell-fashion, and filled with plain earth. Somebody must have cheated. Nothing new in that. They are all thieves nowadays, seeking to eat, as you say in your dialect, with a strict simplicity which leaves nothing to the imagination. At all events this bridge was a fraud, and the peasants clamber

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down a steep footpath they have made through its ruins, and up the other side.

And now you are in the town. The streets are paved, but Verbicaro is not Naples, not Salerno, not even Amalfi. The pavement is of the roughest cobble stones, and the pigs are the scavengers. Pigs everywhere, in the streets, in the houses, at the windows, on the steps of the church in the market-place, to right and left, before you and behind you—like the guns at Balaclava. You never heard of the Six Hundred, though your father was boatswain of a Palermo grain bark and lay three months in the harbour of Sebastopol during the fighting.

Pigs everywhere, black, grunting and happy. Red-skirted, scarlet-bodiced women everywhere, too, all moving and carrying something. Galan-

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tuomini loafing at most of the corners, smoking clay pipes with cane stems, and the great Jew shopkeeper's nose just visible from a distance as he stands in the door of his dingy den. Dirtier and dirtier grow the cobble stones as you go on. Brighter and brighter the huge bunches of red peppers fastened by every window, thicker and thicker on the upper walls and shaky balconies the black melons and yellowish grey cantelopes hung up to keep in the high fresh air, each slung in a hitch of yarn to a nail of its own.

Here and there some one greets you. What have you to sell? Will you take a cargo of pears? Good this year, like all the fruit. The figs and grapes will not be dry for another month. They nod and move on, as you pass by them. Verbicaro is a commercial centre, in spite

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of the pigs. A tall, thin priest meets you, with a long black cigar in his mouth. When he catches your eye he takes it from between his teeth and knocks the ash off, seeing that you are a stranger. Perhaps it is not very clerical to smoke in the streets. But who cares? This is Verbicaro—and besides, it is not a pipe. Monks smoke pipes. Priests smoke cigars.

One more turn down a narrow lane—darkest and dirtiest of all the lanes, the cobble stones only showing here and there above the universal black puddle. Yet the air is not foul, and many a broad street by the Basso Porto in Naples smells far worse. The keen high atmosphere of the Calabrian mountains is a mighty purifier of nastiness, and perhaps the pig is not to be despised after all, as sanitary engineer, scavenger and street sweeper.

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This is Don Pietro Casale's house, the last on the right, with the steep staircase running up outside the building to the second story. And the staircase has an iron railing, and so narrows the lane that a broad-shouldered man can just go by to the cabbage garden beyond without turning sideways. On the landing at the top, outside the closed door and waiting for visitors, sits the pig—a pig larger, better fed and by one shade of filthiness cleaner than other pigs. Don Pietro Casale has been seen to sweep his pig with a broken willow broom, after it has rained.

'Do you take him for a Christian?' asked his neighbour, in amazement, on the occasion.

'No,' answered Don Pietro gravely. 'He is certainly not a Christian. But why should he spoil the tablecloth with his muddy hog's

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back when my guests are at their meals? He is always running under the table for the scraps.'

'And what are women for, except to wash tablecloths?' inquired the neighbour contemptuously.

But he got no answer. Few people ever get more than one from Don Pietro Casale, whose eldest son is doing well at Buenos Ayres, and in whose house the postmaster takes his meals now that he is a widower.

For Don Pietro and his wife Donna Concetta sell their own wine and keep a cook-shop, besides a guest-room with a garret above it, and two beds, with an old-fashioned store of good linen in old-fashioned iron-bound chests. At the time of the fair they can put up a dozen or fourteen guests. People say indeed that the place is not

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so well managed, nor the cooking so good since poor Carmela died, the widow of Ruggiero dei Figli del Rè—Roger of the Children of the King.

For this is the place where the Children of the King lived and died for many generations, and this house of Don Pietro Casale was theirs, and the one on the other side of the cabbage garden, a smaller and poorer one, in which Carmela died. The garden itself was once theirs, and the vineyard beyond, and the olive grove beyond that, and much good land in the valley. For they were galantuomini, and even thought themselves something better, and sometimes, when the wine was new, they talked of noble blood and said that their first ancestor had indeed been a son of a king who had given him all Verbicaro for his own. True it is, at least, that

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they had no other name. Through generation after generation they were christened Ruggiero, Guglielmo, and Sebastiano 'of the Children of the King.' Thus they had anciently appeared in the ill-kept parish registers, and thus was Ruggiero inscribed for the conscription under the new law.

And now, as you know, gaunt, weather-beaten Luigione, licensed master in the coast trade and just now captain of the Sorrentine felucca Giovannina, from Amalfi to Diamante with maccaroni, there are no more of the Children of the King in old Verbicaro, and their goods have fallen into divers hands, but chiefly into those very grasping and close-holding ones of Don Pietro Casale and his wife. But they are not all dead by any means, as you know also, and you

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have even lately seen and talked with one of the fair-haired fellows, who bears the name.

For the Children of the King have almost always had yellow hair and blue eyes, though they have more than once taken to themselves black-browed, brown-skinned Calabrian girls as wives. And this makes one, who knows something more about your country than you do, Luigione—though in a less practical way I confess—this makes one think that they may be the modern descendants of some Norman knightling who took Verbicaro for himself one morning in the old days, and kept it; or perhaps even the far-off progeny of one of those bright-eyed, golden-locked Goths who made slaves of the degenerate Latins some thirteen centuries ago or more, and treated their serfs indeed more like

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cattle than slaves until almost the last of them were driven into the sea with their King Teias by Narses. But a few were left in the southern fastnesses and in the Samnite hills, and northward through the Apennines, scattered here and there where they had been able to hold their own; and some, it is said, forgot Theodoric and Witiges and Totila and Teias, and took service in the Imperial Guard at Constantinople, as Harold of Norway and some of our own hard-fisted sailor fathers did in later years.

Be that as it may—and no one knows how it was—the Children of the King have yellow hair and blue eyes to this present time, and no one would take them for Calabrians, nor for Sicilians, still less for monkey-limbed, hang-dog mouthed, lying, lubberly Neapolitans who can neither

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hand, reef nor steer, nor tell you the difference between a bowline and a buntling, though you may show them a dozen times, nor indeed can do anything but steal and blaspheme and be the foulest, filthiest crew that Captain Satan ever shipped for the Long Voyage. Not fit to slush down the mast of a collier, the best of them.

It must be a dozen years since Carmela died in that little house beyond the cabbage garden. It was a glorious night in September—a strange night in some ways, and not like other nights one remembers, for the full moon had risen over the hills to the left, filling the world with a transparent vapour of silver, so clear and so bright that the very light seemed good to breathe as it is good to drink crystal water from a spring. Verbicaro was all asleep behind Don Pietro

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Casale's house, and in front, from the terrace before the guest-room, one could see the great valley far below beyond the cabbages, deep and mysterious, with silver-dashed shadows and sudden blacknesses, and bright points of white where the moon's rays fell upon a solitary hut. And on the other side of the valley, above Grisolia, a great round-topped mountain and on the top of the mountain an enormous globe of cloud, full of lightning that flashed unceasingly, so that the cloud was at one instant like a ball of silver in the moonlight, and at the next like a ball of fire in darkness. Not a breath stirred the air, and the strange thunderstorm flashed out its life through the long hours, stationary and alone at its vast height.

In the great silence two sounds broke the still-

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ness from time to time; the deep satisfied grunt of a pig turning his fattest side to the cobble-stones as he slept—and the long, low wail of a woman dying in great pain.

The little room was very dark. A single wick burned in the boat-shaped cup of the tall earthen-ware lamp, and there was little oil left in the small receptacle. On the high trestle bed, upon the thinnest of straw mattresses, decently covered with a coarse brown blanket, lay a pale woman, emaciated to a degree hardly credible. A clean white handkerchief was bound round her brow and covered her head, only a scanty lock or two of fair hair escaping at the side of her face. The features were calm and resigned, but when the pain of the death agony seized upon her the thin lips parted and deep lines of suffering appeared

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about the mouth. She seemed to struggle as best she could, but the low, quavering cry would not be stifled—lower and more trembling each time it was renewed.

An old barefooted friar with a kindly eye and a flowing grey beard stood beside her. He had done what he could to comfort her and was going away. But she feebly begged him to stay a little longer. In an interval, while she had no pain, she spoke to her boys.

'Ruggiero—Sebastiano—dear sons—you could not save me, and I am going. God bless you. Our Lady help you—remember—you are Children of the King—remember—ah.'

She sighed heavily and her jaw fell as another sort of pallor spread suddenly over her face. Poor Carmela was dead at last, after weeks of

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sickness, worked to death, as the neighbours said, by Pietro Casale and his wife Concetta.

She left those two boys, lean, poorly clad lads of ten and twelve years, yellow haired and blue eyed, with big bones and hunger-pinched faces. They could just remember seeing their father brought home dead with a knife wound in his breast six years earlier. Now they took hands as they looked at their dead mother with a sort of wondering gaze. There were no tears, no cries of despair—least of all did they show any fear.

Old Padre Michele made them kneel down, still hand in hand, while he recited prayers for the dead. The boys knew some of the responses, learned by ear with small regard for Latinity, though they understood what they were saying.

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When the monk got up they rose also and looked again at the poor dead face.

'You have no relations, my children,' said the old man.

'We are alone,' answered the elder boy in a quiet, clear voice. 'But I will take care of Sebastiano.'

'And I will help Ruggiero,' said the younger in much the same tone.

'You are hungry?'

'Always,' answered both together, without hesitation.

Padre Michele would have smiled, but the hungry faces and the mournful tone told him how true the spoken word must be. He fumbled in the pockets in the breast of his gown, and presently produced a few shady-looking red and

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white sugar sweetmeats, bullet-like in shape and hardness.

'It is all I have now, my children,' said the old man. 'I picked them up yesterday at a wedding, to give them to a poor little girl who was ill. But she was dead when I got there, so you may have them.'

The lads took the stuff thankfully and crunched the stony balls with white, wolfish teeth.

With Padre Michele's help they got an old woman from amongst the neighbours to rouse herself and do what was necessary. When all was over she took the brown blanket as payment without asking for it, smuggling it out of the mean room under her great black handkerchief. But it was day then, and Don Pietro Casale was

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wide awake. He stopped her in the narrow part of the lane at the foot of his own staircase, and forcibly undid the bundle, to the old woman's inexpressible discomfiture. He said nothing, as he took it from her and carried it away, but his thin grey lips smiled quietly. The old woman shook her fist at him behind his back and cursed his dead under her breath. From Rome to Palermo, swear at a man if you please, call him by bad names, and he will laugh at you. But curse his dead relations or their souls, and you had better keep beyond the reach of his knife, or of his hands if he have no weapon. So the old woman was careful that Pietro Casale should not hear her.

'Managgia l'anima di chi t' è morto!' she muttered, as she hobbled away.

Everything in the room where Carmela died

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belonged to Don Pietro, and he took everything. He found the two boys standing together, looking across the fence of the cabbage garden down at the distant valley and over at the height opposite, beyond which the sea was hidden.

'Eh! you good-for-nothings!' he called out to them. 'Is nothing done to-day because the mother is dead? No bread to-night, then—you know that.'

'We will not work for you any more,' answered Ruggiero, the elder, as both turned round.

Don Pietro went up to them. He had a short stout stick in his hand, tough and black with age, and he lifted it as though to drive them to work. They waited quietly till it should please him to come to close quarters, which he did without delay. I have said that he was a man of few

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words. But the Children of the King were not like Calabrian boys, children though they were. Their wolfish teeth were very white as they waited for him with parted lips, and there was an odd blue light in their eyes which is not often seen south of Goth-land.

They were but twelve and ten years old, but they could fight already, in their small way, and had tried it many a time with shepherd lads on the hill-side. But Don Pietro despised children and aimed a blow at Ruggiero's right shoulder. The blow did not take effect, but a moment had not passed before the old peasant lay sprawling on his back with both the boys on top of him.

'You cannot hurt the mother now,' said Ruggiero. 'Hit him as I do, Bastianello!'

And the four bony boyish fists fell in a storm

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of savage blows upon Don Pietro Casale's leathern face and eyes and head and thin grey lips.

'That is for the mother,' said Ruggiero. 'Another fifty a-piece for ourselves.'

The wiry old peasant struggled desperately, and at last threw himself free of them and staggered to his feet.

'Quick, Bastianello!' shouted Ruggiero.

In the twinkling of an eye they were over the fence and running at full speed for the valley. Don Pietro, bruised, dazed and half-blinded, struggled after them, crashing through hedges and stumbling into ditches while he shouted for help in his pursuit. But his heavy shoes hampered him, and at best he was no match for them in speed. His face was covered with purple blotches and his eyelids were swelling at a terrible

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rate. Out of breath and utterly worn out, he stood still and steadied himself against a crooked olive-tree. He could no longer hear even the footsteps of the lads before him.

They were beyond his reach now. The last of the Children of the King had left Verbicaro, where their fathers had lived and died since darker ages than Calabrian history has accurately recorded.

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CHAPTER II

'We shall never see him again,' said Ruggiero, stopping at last and looking back over the stone wall he had just cleared.

Sebastiano listened intently. He was not tall enough to see over, but his ears were sharp.

'I do not hear him any more,' he answered. 'I hurt my hands on his nose,' he added, thoughtfully, as he glanced at his bruised knuckles.

'So did I,' returned his brother. 'He will remember us. Come along—it is far to Scalea.'

'To Scalea? Are we going to Scalea?'

'Eh! If not, where? And where else can we

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eat? Don Antonino will give us a piece of bread.'

'There are figs here,' suggested Sebastiano, looking up into the trees around them.

'It has not rained yet, and if you eat figs from the tree before it has rained you will have pain. But if we are very hungry we will eat them, all the same.'

Little Sebastiano yielded rather reluctantly before his brother's superior wisdom. Besides, Padre Michele had given them a little cold bean porridge at the monastery early in the morning. So they went on their way cautiously, and looking about them at every step now that there was no more need of haste. For they had got amongst the vineyards and orchards where they had no business, and if the peasants saw them,

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the stones would begin to fly. They knew their way about, however, and reached an open foot-path without any adventure, so that in half an hour they were on the mule track to Scalea. They walked much faster than a grown peasant would have done, and they knew the road. Instead of turning to the left after going down the hill beyond the tower, they took the right-hand path to the Scalea river, and as it had not rained they got across without getting very wet. But that road is not so good as the one to Diamante, because the river is sometimes swollen, and people with laden mules have to wait even as much as three days before they can try the ford, and moreover there is bad air there, which brings fever.

At last they struck the long beach and began to trudge through the sand.

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'And what shall we do to-morrow?' asked Sebastiano.

Ruggiero was whistling loudly to show his younger brother that he was not tired nor afraid of anything. At the question he stopped suddenly, and faced the blazing blue sea.

'We can go to America,' he said, after a moment's reflection.

Little Sebastiano did not seem at all surprised by the proposition, but he remained in deep thought for some moments, stamping up a little hillock of sand between his bare feet.

'We are not old enough to be married yet,' he remarked at last.

'That is true,' admitted Ruggiero, reluctantly.

Possibly, the close connection between going to America and being married may not be

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apparent to the poor untutored foreign mind. It would certainly not have been understood a hundred miles north of Sebastiano's heap of sand. And yet it is very simple. In Calabria any strong young fellow with a decently good character can find a wife with a small dowry, though he be ever so penniless. Generally within a week, and always within a fortnight, he emigrates alone, taking all his wife's money with him and leaving her to work for her own living with her parents. He goes to Buenos Ayres or Monte Video. If, at the end of four, five or six years he has managed to increase the money so as to yield a small income, and if his wife behaves herself during his absence, he comes home again and buys a piece of land and builds a house. His friends do not fail to inform him of his

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wife's conduct, and he holds her dowry as a guarantee of her fidelity. But if he fails to enrich himself, or if she is unfaithful to him, he never comes back at all. It is thus clear that a penniless young man cannot go to America until he is married.

'That is very true,' Ruggiero repeated.

'And we must eat,' said Sebastiano, who knew by experience the truth of what he said.

'And we are always hungry. It is very strange. I am hungry now, and yet we had the beans only this morning. It is true that the plate was not full, and there were two of us. I wish we were like the son of Antonio, who never eats. I heard his mother telling the chemist so last winter.'

'He is dead,' said Sebastiano. 'Health to us!' he added, according to custom.

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'Health to us!' repeated Ruggiero. 'Perhaps he died because he did not eat. Who knows? I should, I am sure. Is he dead? I did not know. Come along! If Don Antonino is not away we shall get some bread.'

So they trudged on through the sand. It was still very hot on the yellowish white beach, under the great southern sun in September, but the Children of the King had been used to bearing worse hardships than heat, or cold either, and the thought of the big brown loaves in Don Antonino's wine-shop was very cheering.

At last they reached the foot of the terraced village that rises with its tiers of white and brown houses from the shore to the top of the hill. Not so big nor so prosperous a place as Verbicaro, but much bigger and richer than

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Diamante. There are always a good many fishing boats hauled up on the beach, but you will not often see a cargo boat excepting in the autumn. Don Antonino keeps the cook-shop and the wine cellar in the little house facing the sea, before you turn to the right to go up into the village. He is an old sailor and an honest fellow, and comes from Massa, which is near Sorrento.

A vast old man he is, with keen, quiet grey eyes under heavy lids that droop and slant outward like the lifts of a yard. He is thick-set, heavy, bulky in the girth, flat-footed, iron-handed, slow to move. He has a white beard like a friar, and wears a worsted cap. His skin, having lost at last the tan of thirty years, is like the rough side of light brown sole leather — a sort of yellowish, grey, dead-leaf colour. He is very

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deaf and therefore generally very silent. He has been boatswain on board of many a good ship and there are few ports from Batum to San Francisco where he has not cast anchor.

The boys saw him from a long way off, and their courage rose. He often came to Verbicaro to buy wine and had known their father, and knew them. He would certainly give them a piece of bread. As he saw them coming his quiet eyes watched them, and followed them as they came up the beach. But he did not turn his head, nor move hand or foot, even when they were close to him. He looked so solid and determined to stand still where he was, in the door of his shop, that you might have taken him for an enormous lay figure of a man, made of carved oak and dressed up for a sign to his own

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business. The two lads touched their ragged woollen caps and stood looking at him, wondering whether he would ever move. At last his grey eyes twinkled.

'Have you never seen a Christian before?' he inquired in a deep gruff voice.

He did not seem to be in a good humour. The boys drew back somewhat in awe, and sat down to rest on the stones by the wall. Still Antonino's eyes followed them, though he did not move. Sebastiano looked up at him uneasily from time to time, but Ruggiero gazed steadily at the sea with the affectation of proud indifference to scrutiny, which is becoming in a boy of twelve years. At last the old man stirred, turned slowly as on a pivot and went into the shop.

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'Is it not better to speak to him?' asked Sebastiano of his brother in a whisper.

'No. He is deaf. If he did not understand us he would be angry and would give us no bread.'

Presently Don Antonino came out again. He held half a loaf and a big slab of goat's-milk cheese between his huge thumb and finger. He paused exactly on the spot where he had stood so long, and seemed about to become absorbed in the contemplation of the empty fishing boats lying in the sun. Sebastiano watched him with hungry eyes, but Ruggiero again stared at the sea. After several minutes the old boatswain got under way again and came to them, holding out the food to them both.

'Eat,' he said laconically.

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They both jumped up and thanked him, and pulled at their ragged caps before they took the bread and cheese from his hand. He nodded gravely, which was his way of explaining that he could not hear but that it was all right, and then he watched them as they set to work.

'Like wolves,' he said solemnly, as he looked on.

The place was quite deserted at that hour. Only now and then a woman passed, with an earthen jar of water on her head and her little tin bucket and rope in her hand. The public well is not fifty yards from Antonino's house, up the brook and on the left of it. The breeze was dying away and it was very hot, though the sun was already behind the high rocks of the cape.

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'Where are the beasts?' asked Don Antonino, as the boys swallowed their last mouthful.

Ruggiero threw his head back and stuck out his chin, which signifies negation in the south. He knew it was of little use to speak unless he could get near the old man's ear and shout.

'And what are you doing here?' asked the latter.

Speech was now unavoidable. Ruggiero stood on tiptoe and the old man bent over sideways, much as a heavily laden Dutch galliot heels to a stiff breeze.

'The mother is dead!' bawled the boy in his high strong voice.

Oddly enough the tears came into his eyes for the first time, as he shouted at the deaf old man, and at the same moment little Sebastiano's

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lower lip trembled. Antonino shook his head in rough sympathy.

'We have also beaten Don Pietro Casale, and so we have run away,' yelled the boy.

Antonino grunted thoughtfully and his grey eyes twinkled as he slowly righted himself and stood up again. Very deliberately he went into the shop again and presently came back with a big measure of weak wine and water.

'Drink,' he said, holding out the jug.

Again the two boys pulled at their caps and each raised the jug respectfully toward the old man before drinking.

'To health,' each said, and Antonino nodded gravely.

Then Ruggiero took the jug inside and rinsed it, as he knew it was his duty to do and set it

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on the table. When he came back he stood beside his brother, waiting for Don Antonino to speak. A long silence followed.

'Sleep,' said the old man. 'Afterwards we will talk.'

He took his old place in the doorway and stared steadily out to sea. The boys lay down beside the house, and having eaten and drunk their fill and walked a matter of fifteen miles, were sound asleep in three minutes.

At sunset Ruggiero sat up suddenly and rubbed his eyes. Don Antonino was no longer at the door, and the sound of several men's voices came from within, mingled with the occasional dull rattle of coarse glasses on wooden tables.

'Ò!' Ruggiero called softly to his brother. Then he added a syllable and called again, 'O-è!'

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Little Sebastiano woke, sat up and looked about him, rubbing his eyes in his turn.

'What has happened?' he inquired, only half awake.

'By the grace of God we have eaten, we have drunk and we have slept,' said Ruggiero by way of answer.

Both got up, shook themselves and stood with their hands in their pockets, looking at the sea. They were barefooted and barelegged, with torn breeches, coarse white shirts much patched about the shoulders, and ragged woollen caps. Presently they turned as by a common instinct and went and stood before the open door, peering in at the guests. Don Antonino was behind his black counter measuring wine. His wife was with him now and helping him, a cheerful, clean woman

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having a fair complexion, grey hair and round sharp eyes with red lids—a stranger in Calabria like her husband. She held the neck of a great pear-shaped demijohn, covered with straw, of which the lower part rested on the counter. Antonino held a quart jug to be filled while she lowered the mouth, and he poured the measure each time into a barrel through a black tin funnel. They both counted the measures in audible tones, checking each other as it were. The wine was very dark and strong and the smell filled the low room and came out through the door. Half-a-dozen men sat at the tables, mostly eating ship biscuit of their own and goat's-milk cheese which they bought with their wine. They were rough-looking fellows, generally in checked flannel shirts and homespun trousers. But they

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all wore boots or shoes, which are in the south a distinctive sign of a certain degree of prosperity. Most of them had black beards and smart woollen caps. They were men who got their living principally by the sea in one way or another, but none of them looked thorough seamen. They talked loud and with a certain air of boasting, they were rough, indeed, but not strongly built nor naturally easy in their movements as sailors are. Their eyes were restless and fiery, but the glance was neither keen nor direct. Altogether they contrasted oddly with Don Antonino, the old boatswain. This part of Calabria does not breed genuine sea folk.

Antonino took no notice of the boys as they stood outside the door, but went quietly on with his work, measuring quart after quart of wine and pouring it into the barrel.

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'If it were a keg, I could carry it for him,' said Ruggiero, 'but I cannot lift a barrel yet.'

'We could roll it, together,' suggested Sebastiano thoughtfully.

Presently Don Antonino finished his job and bunged the barrel with a cork and a bit of old sailcloth. Then he looked up and stood still. The boys were not quite sure whether he was watching them or not, for it was already dusk. His wife lit a small German petroleum lamp and hung it in the middle of the room, and then went to the fireplace in the dark corner where something was cooking. One of the guests shouted to Antonino.

'There is a martingane at San Nicola,' he bawled.

Antonino turned his head slowly to the speaker and waited for more.

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'Bound east,' continued the man. 'From Majuri.'

'What is wrong with her?' inquired the old host.

Boats going west, that is, towards Naples and Civita Vecchia, often put in to the small natural harbours to wait for the night wind. Those going east never do except for some especial reason.

The man said nothing, but fixed his eyes on Antonino and slowly filled his pipe, evidently intending to convey some secret piece of information by the look and action. But the old sailor's stolid face did not betray the slightest intelligence. He turned away and deliberately took half-a-dozen salted sprats from a keg behind the counter and laid them in a dish preparatory to cleaning them for his own supper. The man who

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had spoken to him seemed annoyed, but only shrugged his shoulders impatiently and went on eating and drinking.

Antonino took a jug of water and went outside to wash his fish. The two boys offered to do it for him, but he shook his head. He did not speak until he had almost finished.

'We will fish to-night,' he said at last, in a low voice, pouring a final rinsing of water into the dish. 'Sleep in the sand under the third boat from the rocks. I will wake you when I am ready.'

He looked from one to the other of the lads with a keen glance, and then laid one huge finger against his lips. He drained the water from his dish and went in again.

'Come along,' said Ruggiero softly. 'Let us find the boat and get out of the way.'

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The craft was a small 'gozzo,' or fisherman's boat, not above a dozen or fourteen feet long, sharp and much alike at bow and stern, but with a high stem surmounted by a big ball of wood, very convenient for hanging nets upon. It was almost dark by this time, but the boys saw that she was black as compared with the other boats on both sides of her. She was quite empty and lay high and dry on three low chocks. Ruggiero lay down, getting as close to the keel as he could and Sebastiano followed his example. They lay head to head so that they could talk in a whisper.

'Why are we not to speak of his fishing?' asked the younger boy.

'Who knows? But if we do as he tells us he will give us more bread to-morrow.'

'He is very good to us.'

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'Because we beat Don Pietro Casale. Don Pietro cheated him last year. I saw the cottonseed oil he mixed with the good, in that load we brought down.'

'Perhaps the fishing is not for fish,' suggested little Sebastiano, curling himself up and laying his head on the end of the chock.

They did not know what time it was when Don Antonino gently stirred them with his big foot. They sprang up wide awake and saw in the starlight that he had a pair of oars and a coil of rope in his hands.

'As I launch her, take the chocks from behind and put them in front,' he said in a low voice.

Then he laid the oars softly in the bows and dropped the rope into the bottom, and began to push the boat slowly down to the sea. The boys did as he had told them to do, and in a few

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minutes the bows were in the rippling water. The old sailor took off his shoes and stockings and put them on board, and rolled up his trousers. Then with a strong push he sent her down over the pebbles and got upon the bows as she floated out. To look at his heavy form you would not have thought that he could move so lightly and quickly when he pleased. In a moment he was standing over the oars and backing to the beach again for the boys to get in. They stood above their knees in the warm water and handed him the chocks before they got on board. He nodded as though satisfied, but said nothing as he pulled away towards the rocky point. The lads sat silently in the stern, wondering whither he was taking them. He certainly had brought no fishing tackle with him. There was not even a torch

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and harpoon aboard for spearing the fish. He pulled rapidly and steadily as though he were going on an errand and were in a hurry, keeping close under the high rocks as soon as he was clear of the reefs at the cape. At last, nearly an hour after starting, the boys made out a great deserted tower just ahead. Then Antonino stopped pulling, unshipped his oars one after the other and muffled them just where the strap works on the thole-pin, by binding bits of sailcloth round them. He produced the canvas and the rope-yarn from his pockets, and the boys watched his quick, workmanlike movements without understanding what he was doing. When he began to pull again the oars made no noise against the tholes, and he dipped the blades gently into the water, as he pulled past the tower into the sheltered bay beyond.

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Then a vessel loomed up suddenly under the great cliffs, and a moment later he was under her side, tapping softly against the planking. The boys held their breath and watched him. Presently a dark head appeared above the bulwarks and remained stationary for a while. Antonino stood up in his boat so as to lessen the distance and make himself more easily recognisable. Then a hand appeared beside the head and made a gesture, then dived down and came up again with the end of a rope, lowering it down into the boat. Antonino gave the line to Ruggiero and then stepped off upon the great hook on the martingane's side to which the chain links for beaching, got hold of the after shroud and swung himself on board.

Now it may be as well to say here what a

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martingane is. She is a good-sized, decked vessel, generally between five-and-twenty and a hundred tons, with good beam and full bows, narrow at the stern and rather high out of water unless very heavily laden. She has one stout mast, cross-trees, and a light topmast. She has an enormous yard, much longer than herself, on which is bent the high peaked mainsail. She carries a gaff-top-sail, fore-staysail, jib and flying-jib, and can rig out all sorts of light sails when she is before the wind. She is a good sea boat, but slow and clumsy, and needs a strong crew to handle her.

The two boys who sat in the fishing boat alongside the martingane on that dark night had no idea that all sea-going vessels were not called ships; but there was something mysteriously attractive to them in the black hull, the high

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tapering yard, and the shadowy rigging. They were certainly not imaginative boys, but they could not help wondering where the great dark thing had been and whither she might be going. They did not know what going to sea meant, nor what real deep-sea vessels were like, and they even fancied that this one might have been to America. But they understood well enough that they were to make no noise, and they kept their reflections to themselves, silently holding on to the end of the rope as they sat in their places.

They did not wait very long. In a few minutes Antonino and the other man came to the side, carrying an odd-looking black bundle, sewn up in what Ruggiero felt was oiled canvas as he steadied it down into the stern of the little boat,

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and neatly hitched round from end to end with spun-yarn, so as to be about the shape of an enormous sausage. The two men lowered it without much caution; it was heavy but rather limp. Then came another exactly like the first, which they also lowered into the boat, and a moment later Don Antonino came over the side as quickly and noiselessly as he had gone up, and shoved off quietly into the starlight.

Half an hour later he ran alongside of a narrow ledge of rock, apparently quite inaccessible from the land above, but running up along the cliff in such a way that, in case of danger from the sea, a man could get well out of reach of the breakers. He went ashore, taking the end of his own coil of rope with him. He made it fast in the dark shadow, and he must have known the

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place very well, for there was but one small hole running under a stone wedged in a cleft of the rock, through which he could pass the line. He got back into the boat.

'Get ashore, boys,' he said, 'and wait here. If you see a revenue boat, with coast-guards in it, coming towards you as though the men wanted to speak to you, cast off the end of the rope and let it run into the sea. Then run up the ledge there, and climb the rock, the faster the better. There is a way up. But keep out of sight when it is day, by lying flat in the hollow there. If anybody else comes in a boat, and says nothing, but just takes the rope, do not hinder him. Let him take it, and he will take you too, and give you a couple of biscuits.'

Don Antonino pushed off a little, letting the

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rope run out. Then he made his end of it fast to the two ends of the black bundles, and backing out as far as he could, he let them both down gently into the water, and pulled away, leaving the Children of the King alone on the ledge. He had managed to bring the rope down through the cleft, so that it could not easily be seen from the sea. The boys waited some time before either of them spoke, although the old fellow was deaf.

'Those things looked like dead men,' said Sebastiano at last.

'But they are not,' answered Ruggiero confidently. 'Now I know why Don Antonino is so rich. He smuggles tobacco.'

'If we could smuggle tobacco, too, it would be a fortune,' remarked the younger boy. 'He

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would give us bread every day, with cheese, and wine to drink.'

'We shall see.'

They sat a long time, waiting for something to happen, and then fell asleep, curling themselves up in the hollow as they had been told to do. At dawn they awoke and began to look out for the revenue boat. But she did not appear in sight. The hours were very long and it was very hot, and they had nothing to eat or drink. Then all at once they saw what seemed to them the most beautiful vision they could remember. A big felucca shot round the rocks, still under way from the breeze she had found in the little bay. Her full white sails still shivered in the sun, and the boys could see the blue light that passed up under her keel and was reflected upon her snow-

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white side as she ceased to move just in front of them.

A big man with a red beard and a white shirt stood at the helm and fixed his eyes on the point where the lads were hiding. He evidently saw them, for he nodded to a man near him and gave an order. In a moment the dingy was launched and a sailor came ashore. He jumped nimbly out, holding the painter of his boat in one hand, glanced at the boys, who stood up as soon as they saw that they were discovered, and cast off the end of the rope, keeping hold of it lest it should run. Then without paying any more attention to the boys, he went on board again taking the end with him.

'And we?' shouted Ruggiero after him, as he pulled away facing them.

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'I do not know you,' he answered.

'But we know you and Don Antonino,' said Sebastiano, who was quick-witted.

'Wait a while,' replied the sailor.

The man at the helm spoke to him while the others were hauling up the bundles out of the water and getting them on board. The dingy came rapidly back and the sailor sterned her to the rock for the boys to get in. In a few minutes they were over the side of the felucca.[1]

[1] A felucca is a two-masted boat of great length in proportion to her beam, and generally a very good sailer. She carries two very large lateen sails, uncommonly high at the peak, and one jib. She is sometimes quite open, sometimes half-decked, and sometimes fully decked, according to her size. She carries generally from ten to thirty tons of cargo, and is much used in the coasting trade, all the way from Civita Vecchia to the Diamante. The model of a first-rate felucca is very like that of a Viking's ship which was discovered not many years since in a mound in Norway.

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They pulled at their ragged caps as they came up to the man at the helm, who proved to be the master.

'What do you want?' he asked roughly, but he looked them over from head to foot, one at a time.

'The mother is dead,' said Ruggiero, 'and, moreover, we have beaten Don Pietro Casale and run away from Verbicaro, and we wish to be sailors.'

'Verbicaro?' repeated the master. 'Land folk, then. Have you ever been to sea?'

'No, but we are strong and can work.'

'You may come with me to Sorrento. You will find work there. I am short-handed. I daresay you are worth a biscuit apiece.'

He spoke in the roughest tone imaginable, and

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his black eyes—for he had black eyes and thick black hair in spite of his red beard—looked angry and fiery while he talked. Altogether you would have thought that he was in a very bad temper and not at all disposed to take a couple of starving lads on board out of charity. But he did not look at all such a man as those awkward, gaudily dressed, unsteady fellows the boys had seen in Antonino's shop on the previous night. He looked a seaman, every inch of him, and they instinctively felt that as he stood there at the helm he knew his business thoroughly and could manage his craft as coolly in a winter storm as on this flat September sea, when the men were getting the sweeps out because there was not a breath of wind to stir the sails.

'Go forward and pick beans for dinner,' he said.

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That was the first job given the Children of the King when they went to sea. For to sea they went and turned out seamen in due time, as good as the master who took them first, and perhaps a little better, though that is saying much.

And so I have told you who the Children of the King are and how they shipped as boys on board of a Sorrento felucca, being quite alone in the world, and now I will tell you of some things which happened to them afterwards, and not quite so long ago.

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CHAPTER III

TEN years have passed since the ever-memorable day on which the Children of the King hurt their fists so badly in battering Don Pietro Casale's sharp nose. They are big, bony men, now, with strongly marked features, short yellow hair and fair beards. So far they are alike, and at first sight might be taken for twin brothers. But there is a marked difference between them in character, which shows itself in their faces. Ruggiero's eye is of a colder blue, is less mobile and of harder expression than Sebastiano's. His firm lips are generally tightly closed, and his

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square chin is bolder than his brother's. He is stronger, too, though not by very much, and though he is more silent and usually more equable, he has by far the worse temper of the two. At sea there is little to choose between them. Perhaps, on the whole, Sebastiano has always been the favourite amongst his companions, while Ruggiero has been thought the more responsible and possibly the more dangerous in a quarrel. Both, however, have acquired an extraordinarily good reputation as seamen, and also as boatmen on the pleasure craft of all sizes which sail the gulf of Naples during the summer season.

They have made several long voyages, too. They have been to New York and to Buenos Ayres and have seen many ports of Europe and

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America, and much weather of all sorts north and south of the Line. They have known what it is to be short of victuals five hundred miles from land with contrary winds; they have experienced the delights of a summer at New Orleans, waiting for a cargo and being eaten alive by mosquitoes; they have looked up, in January, at the ice-sheeted rigging, when boiling water froze upon the shrouds and ratlines, and the captain said that no man could lay out upon the topsail yard, though the north-easter threatened to blow the sail out of the bolt-ropes—but Ruggiero got hold of the lee earing all the same and Sebastiano followed him, and the captain swore a strange oath in the Italo-American language, and went aloft himself to help light the sail out to windward, being still a young man and not liking to be

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beaten by a couple of beardless boys, as the two were then.[1] And they have seen many strange sights, sea-serpents not a few, and mermaids quite beyond the possibility of mistake, and men who can call the wind with four knots in a string and words unlearnable, and others who can alter the course of a waterspout by a secret spell, and a captain who made a floating beacon of junk soaked in petroleum in a tar-barrel and set it adrift and stood up on the quarter-deck calling on all the three hundred and sixty-five saints in the calendar out of the Neapolitan almanack he held—and got a breeze, too, for his pains, as Ruggiero adds with a quiet and some-

[1] The writer knows of a Sorrentine captain, commanding a large bark, who when topsails are reefed in his watch regularly takes the lee earing, which, as most landsmen need to be told, is the post of danger and honour.

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what incredulous smile when he has finished the yarn. All these things they have seen with their eyes, and many more which it is impossible to remember, but all equally astonishing though equally familiar to everybody who has been at sea ten years.

And now in mid-June they are at home again, since Sorrento is their home now, and they are inclined to take a turn with the pleasure boats by way of a change and engage themselves for the summer, Ruggiero with a gentleman from the north of Italy known as the Conte di San Miniato, and Sebastiano with a widowed Sicilian lady and her daughter, the Marchesa di Mola and the Signorina Beatrice Granmichele, generally, if incorrectly, spoken of as Donna Beatrice.

Now the Conte di San Miniato, though only

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a count, and reputed to be out at elbows, if not up to his ears in debt, is the sole surviving representative of a very great and ancient family in the north. But how the defunct Granmichele got his title of Marchese di Mola, no one knows precisely. Two things are certain, that his father never had a title at all, and that he himself made a large fortune in sulphur and paving stones, so that his only daughter is much of an heiress, and his elderly widow has a handsome income to spend as she pleases, owns in Palermo a fine palace—historical in other hands—is the possessor of a smartish yacht, a cutter of thirty tons or so, goes to Paris once and to Monte Carlo twice in every year, brings her own carriage to Sorrento in the summer, and lives altogether in a luxurious and highly correct manner.

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She is a tall, thin woman of forty years or thereabouts, with high features, dark eyes, a pale olive complexion, black hair white at the temples, considerable taste in dress, and an absolute contempt for physical exertion, mental occupation and punctuality.

Donna Beatrice, as they call her daughter, is a very pretty girl, aged nineteen or nearly, of grey-hound build, so to say, by turns amazingly active and astonishingly indolent, capricious and decided in her caprices while they last, passionately fond of dancing, much inclined to amuse herself in her own way when her mother is not looking, and possessing a keen sense of prime and ultimate social ratios. She is unusually well educated, speaks three languages, knows that somehow North and South America are not exactly the

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same as the Northern and Southern States, has heard of Virgil and the Crusades, can play a waltz well, and possesses a very sweet little voice. She is undoubtedly pretty. Brown, on the whole, as to colouring—brown skin, liquid brown eyes, dark brown hair—a nose not regular but attractive, a mouth not small but expressive, eyebrows not finely pencilled, neither arched nor straight, but laid on as it were like the shadows in a clever charcoal drawing, with the finger, broad, effective, well turned, carelessly set in the right place by a hand that never makes mistakes.

It is the intention of the Marchesa di Mola to marry her daughter to the very noble and out-at-elbows Count of San Miniato before the summer is out. It is also the intention of the Count to marry Beatrice. It is Beatrice's intention to

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do nothing rashly, but to take as much time as she can get for making up her mind, and then to do exactly as she pleases. She perfectly appreciates her own position and knows that she can either marry a rich man of second-rate family, or a poor man of good blood, a younger son or a half-ruined gentleman at large like San Miniato, and she hesitates. She is not quite sure of the value of money yet. It might be delightful to be even much richer than she is, because there are so many delightful things to be done in the world with money alone. But it might turn out to be equally agreeable to have a great name, to be somebody, to be a necessary part of society in short, because society does a number of agreeable things not wholly dependent upon cash for being pleasant, and indeed often largely dependent on credit.

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San Miniato attracts her, and she does not deny the fact to herself. He is handsome, tall, fair, graceful and exceedingly well dressed. He was several years in a cavalry regiment and is reputed to have left the service in order to fight with a superior officer whom he disliked. In reality his straitened means may have had something to do with the step. At all events he scratched his major rather severely in the duel which took place, and has the reputation of a dangerous man with the sabre. It is said that the major's wife had something to do with the story. At present San Miniato is about thirty years of age. His only known vice is gambling, which is perhaps a chief source of income to him. Every one agrees in saying that he is the type of the honourable player, and that, if he wins on the

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whole, he owes his winnings to his superior coolness and skill. The fact that he gambles rather lends him an additional interest in the eyes of Beatrice, whose mother often plays and who would like to play herself.

Ruggiero, who is to be San Miniato's boatman this summer, is waiting outside the Count's door, until that idle gentleman wakes from his late sleep and calls him. The final agreement is yet to be made, and Ruggiero makes calculations upon his fingers as he sits on the box in the corridor. The Count wants a boat and three sailors by the month, and if he is pleased, will keep them all the season. It became sufficiently clear to Ruggiero during the first interview that his future employer did not know the difference between a barge and a felucca, and he has had

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ocular demonstration that the Count cannot swim, for he has seen him in the water by the bathing-houses—a thorough landsman at all points. But there are two kinds of landsmen, those who are afraid, and those who are not, as Ruggiero well knows. The first kind are amusing and the sailors get more fun out of them than they know of; the second kind are dangerous and are apt to get more out of the sailor than they pay for, by bullying him and calling him a coward. But on the whole Ruggiero, being naturally very daring and singularly indifferent to life as a possession, hopes that San Miniato may turn out to be of the unreasonably reckless rather than of the tiresomely timid class, and is inclined to take his future master's courage for granted as he makes his calculations.

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'I will take the Son of the Fool and the Cripple,' he mutters decisively. 'They are good men, and we can always have the Gull for a help when we need four.'

A promising crew, by the names, say you of the North, who do not understand Southern ways. But in Sorrento and all down the coast, most seafaring men get nicknames under which their real and legal appellations disappear completely and are totally forgotten.

The Fool, whose son Ruggiero meant to engage, had earned his title in bygone days by dancing an English hornpipe for the amusement of his companions, the Gull owed his to the singular length and shape of his nose, and the Cripple had in early youth worn a pair of over-tight boots on Sundays, whereby he had limped sadly on the

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first day of every week, for nearly two years. So that the crew were all sound in mind and body in spite of their alarming names.

Ruggiero sat on the box and waited, meditating upon the probable occupations of gentlemen who habitually slept till ten o'clock in the morning and sometimes till twelve. From time to time he brushed an almost imperceptible particle of dust from his very smart blue cloth knees, and settled the in-turned collar of the perfectly new blue guernsey about his neck. It was new, and it scratched him disagreeably, but it was highly necessary to present a prosperous as well as a seamanlike appearance on such an important occasion. Nothing could have been more becoming to him than the dark close-fitting dress, showing as it did the immense breadth and depth

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of his chest, the clean-cut sinewy length of his limbs and the easy grace and strength of his whole carriage. His short straight fair hair was brushed, too, and his young yellow beard had been recently trimmed. Altogether a fine figure of a man as he sat there waiting.

Suddenly he was aware of a wonderful vision moving towards him down the broad corridor—a lovely dark face with liquid brown eyes, an exquisite figure clad in a well-fitted frock of white serge, a firm, smooth step that was not like any step he had ever heard. He rose quickly as she passed him, and the blood rushed to his face, up to the very roots of his hair.

Beatrice was too much of a woman not to see the effect she produced upon the poor sailor, and she nodded gracefully to him, in acknowledg-

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ment of his politeness in rising. As she did so she noticed on her part that the poor sailor was indeed a very remarkable specimen of a man, such as she had not often seen. She stopped and spoke to him.

'Are you the Count of San Miniato's boatman?' she asked in her sweet voice.

'Yes, Eccellenza,' answered Ruggiero, still blushing violently.

'Then he has engaged the boat? We want a boat, too—the Marchesa di Mola—can you get us one?'

'There is my brother, Eccellenza.'

'Is he a good sailor?'

'Better than I, Eccellenza.'

Beatrice looked at the figure before her and smiled graciously.

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'Send him to us at twelve o'clock,' she said. 'The Marchesa di Mola—do not forget.'

'Yes, Eccellenza.'

Ruggiero bowed respectfully, while Beatrice nodded again and passed on. Then he sat down again and waited, but his fingers no longer moved in calculations and his expression had changed. He sat still and stared in the direction of the corner beyond which the young girl had disappeared. He was conscious for the first time in his life that he possessed a heart, for the thing thumped and kicked violently under his blue guernsey, and he looked down at his broad chest with an odd expression of half-childish curiosity, fully expecting to see an outward and visible motion corresponding with the inward hammering. But he saw nothing. Solid ribs

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and solid muscles kept the obstreperous machine in its place.

'Malora!' he ejaculated to himself. 'Worse than a cat in a sack!'

His hands, too, were quite cold, though it was a warm day. He noticed the fact as he passed his thumb for the hundredth time round his neck where the hard wool scratched him. To tell the truth he was somewhat alarmed. He had never been ill a day in his life, had never had as much as a headache, a bad cold or a touch of fever, and he began to think that something must be wrong. He said to himself that if such a thing happened to him again he would go to the chemist and ask for some medicine. His strength was the chief of his few possessions, he thought, and it would be better to spend a franc at the chemist's than

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to let it be endangered. It was a serious matter. Suppose that the young lady, instead of speaking to him about a boat, had told him to pick up the box on which he was sitting—one of those big boxes these foreigners travel with—and to carry it upstairs, he would have cut a poor figure just at that moment, when his heart was thumping like a flat-fish in the bottom of a boat, and his hands were trembling with cold. If it chanced again, he would certainly go to Don Ciccio the chemist and buy a dose of something with a strong bad taste, the stronger and the worse flavoured the better, of course, as every one knew. Very alarming, these symptoms!

Then he fell to thinking of the young lady herself, and she seemed to rise before him, just as he had seen her a few moments earlier. The

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signs of his new malady immediately grew worse again, and when it somehow struck him that he might serve her, and let Sebastiano be boatman to the Count, the pounding at his ribs became positively terrifying, and he jumped up and began to walk about. Just then the door opened suddenly and San Miniato put out his head.

'Are you the sailor who is to get me a boat?' he asked.

'Yes, Eccellenza,' answered Ruggiero, turning quickly, cap in hand. Strange to say, at the sound of a man's voice the alarming symptoms totally disappeared and Ruggiero was quite himself again.

He remembered also that he had been engaged for the Count, through the people of the hotel, on condition of approval, and that it would be

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contrary to boatman's honour to draw back. After all, too, women in a boat were always a nuisance at the best, and he liked the Count's face, and decided that he was not of the type of landsmen who are frightened. The interview did not last long.

'I shall wish to make excursions in all directions,' said San Miniato. 'I do not know anything about the sea, but I dislike people who make difficulties and talk to me of bad weather when I mean to go anywhere. Do you understand?'

'We will try to content your excellency,' answered Ruggiero quietly.

'Good. We shall see.'

So Ruggiero went away to find the Son of the Fool, and the Cripple, and to engage them for the

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summer, and to deliver to his brother the message from the Marchesa di Mola. The reason why Ruggiero did not take Sebastiano as one of his own crew was a simple one. There lived and still lives at Sorrento, a certain old man known as the Greek. The Greek is old and infirm and has a vicious predilection for wine and cards, so that he is quite unfit for the sea. But he owns a couple of smart sailing boats and gets a living by letting them to strangers. It is necessary, however, to have at least one perfectly reliable man in charge of each, and so soon as the Children of the King had returned from their last long voyage the Greek had engaged them both for this purpose, as being in every way superior to the common run of boatmen who hung about the place waiting for jobs. It was consequently

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impossible that the two brothers could be in the same boat's crew during the summer.

Ruggiero found the Cripple asleep in the shade, having been out all night fishing, and the Son of the Fool was seated not far from him, plaiting sinnet for gaskets. The two were inseparable, so far as their varied life permitted them to be together, and were generally to be found in the same crew. Average able seamen both, much of the same height and build, broad, heavy fellows good at the oar, peaceable and uncomplaining.

While Ruggiero was talking with the one who was awake, his own brother appeared, and Ruggiero gave him the message, whereupon Sebastiano went off to array himself in his best before presenting himself to the Marchesa di Mola. The Son of the Fool gathered up his work.

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'Mola?' he repeated in a tone of inquiry.

Ruggiero nodded carelessly.

'A Sicilian lady who has a cutter?'

'Yes.'

'Her daughter is going to marry a certain Conte di San Miniato—a great signore—of those without soldi.'

The sailor coiled the plaited sinnet neatly over his bare arm, but looked up as Ruggiero uttered an exclamation.

'What is the matter with you?' he asked.

Ruggiero's face was quite red and his broad chest heaved as he bit his lip and thrust his hands into his pockets. His companion repeated his question.

'Nothing is the matter,' answered Ruggiero. 'Wake up the Cripple and see if there is every-

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thing for rigging the boat. We must have her out this afternoon. The Conte di San Miniato of whom you speak is our signore.'

'Oh! I understand!' exclaimed the Son of the Fool. 'Well—you need not be so anxious. I daresay it is not true that he has no money, and at all events the Greek will pay us.'

'Of course, the Greek will pay us,' answered Ruggiero thoughtfully. 'I will be back in half an hour,' he added, turning away abruptly.

He walked rapidly up the steep paved ascent which leads through the narrow gorge from the small beach to the town above. A few minutes later he entered the chemist's shop for the first time in his life in search of medicine for himself. He took off his cap and looked about him with some curiosity, eyeing the long rows of old-

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fashioned majolica drug jars, and the stock of bottles of all colours and labels in the glass cases. The chemist was a worthy old creature with a white beard and solemn ways.

'What do you want?' he inquired.

'A little medicine, but good,' answered Ruggiero, looking critically along the shelves, as though to select a remedy. 'A little of the best,' he added, jingling a few silver coins in his pockets and wondering how much the stuff would cost.

'But what kind of medicine?' asked the old man. 'Do you feel ill? Where?'

'Here,' answered Ruggiero bringing his heavy bony hand down upon his huge chest with a noise that made the chemist start, and then chuckle.

'Just there, eh?' said the latter ironically. 'You have the health of a horse. Go to dinner.'

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'I tell you it is there,' returned Ruggiero. 'Sometimes it is quite quiet, as it is now, but sometimes it jumps and threshes like a dolphin at sea.'

'H'm! The heart, eh?' The old man came round his counter and applied his ear to Ruggiero's breast. 'Regular as a steam engine,' he said. 'When does it jump, as you call it? When you go up hill?'

Ruggiero laughed.

'Am I old or fat?' he inquired contemptuously. 'It happened first this morning. I was waiting in the hotel and a lady came by and spoke to me—about a certain boat.'

'A lady? H'm! Young perhaps, and pretty?'

'That is my business. Then half an hour later I was talking to the Son of the Fool. You

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know him I daresay. And it began to jump again, and I said to myself, "'Health is the first thing,' as the old people say." So I came for the medicine.'

The chemist chuckled audibly.

'And what were you talking about?' he asked. 'The lady?'

'It is true,' answered Ruggiero in a tone of reflection. 'The Son of the Fool was telling me that the lady is to marry my signore.'

'And you want medicine!' cried the old man, laughing aloud. 'Imbecile! Have you never been in love?'

Ruggiero stared at him.

'Eh! A girl here and there — in Buenos Ayres, in New Orleans — what has that to do with it? You—what the malora—the plague

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—are you talking about? Eh? Explain a little.'

'You had better go back to Buenos Ayres, or to some other place where you will not see the lady any more,' said the chemist. 'You are in love with her. That is all the matter.'

'I, with a gran' signora, a great lady! You are crazy, Don Ciccio!'

'Crazy or not—tell me to-morrow whether your heart does not beat every time she looks at you. As for her being a great lady—we are men, and they are women.'

The chemist had socialistic ideas of his own.

'To please you,' said Ruggiero, 'I will go and see her now, and I will be back in an hour to tell you that you do not understand your business.

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My brother is to go there at twelve and I will go with him. Of course I shall see her.'

He turned to go, but stopped suddenly on the threshold and came back.

'There!' he cried triumphantly. 'There it is again, but not so hard this time. Is the lady here, now?' He pushed his chest against the old man's ear.

'Madonna mia! What a machine!' exclaimed the latter, after listening a moment. 'If I had a heart like that!'

'Now you see for yourself,' said Ruggiero. 'I want the best medicine.'

But again the chemist broke into a laugh.

'Medicine! A medicine for love! Do you not see that it began to beat at the thought of seeing her? Go and try it, as you proposed. Then you will understand.'

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'I understand that you are crazy. But I will try it all the same.'

Thereupon Ruggiero strode out of the shop without further words, considerably disappointed and displeased with the result of the interview. The chemist apparently took him for a fool. It was absurd to suppose that the sight of any woman, or the mention of any woman, could make a man's heart behave in such a way, and yet he was obliged to admit that the coincidence was undeniable.

He found his brother just coming out of the house in which they lodged, arrayed at all points exactly like himself. Sebastiano's young beard was not quite so thick, his eyes were a little softer, his movements a trifle less energetically direct than Ruggiero's, and he was, perhaps, an

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inch shorter; but the resemblance was extraordinary and would have struck any one.

They were admitted to the presence of the Marchesa di Mola in due time. She lay in a deep chair under the arches of her terrace, shaded by brown linen curtains, languid, idle, indifferent as ever.

'Beatrice!' she called in a lazy tone, as the two men stood still at a respectful distance, waiting to be addressed.

But instead of Beatrice, a maid appeared at a door at the other end of the terrace—a fresh young thing with rosy cheeks, brown hair, sparkling black eyes and a pretty figure.

'Call Donna Beatrice,' said the Marchesa. Then, as though exhausted by the effort of speaking, she closed her eyes and waited.

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The maid cast a quick glance at the two handsome sailors and disappeared again. Ruggiero and Sebastiano stood motionless, only their eyes turning from side to side and examining everything with the curiosity habitual in seamen.

Presently Beatrice entered, looked at them both for a moment and then went up to her mother.

'It is for the boat, mamma,' she said. 'Do you wish me to arrange about it?'

'Of course,' answered the Marchesa opening her eyes and immediately shutting them again.

Beatrice stepped aside and beckoned the two men to her. To Ruggiero's infinite surprise, he again felt the blood rushing to his face, and his heart began to pound his ribs like a fuller's hammer. He glanced at his brother and saw

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that he was perfectly self-possessed. Beatrice looked from one to the other in perplexity.

'You are so much alike!' she exclaimed. 'With which of you did I speak this morning?'

'With me, Eccellenza,' said Ruggiero, whose own voice sounded strangely in his ears. 'And this is my brother,' he added.

The arrangement was soon made, but during the short interchange of questions and answers Ruggiero could not take his eyes from Beatrice's face. Possibly he was not even aware that it was rude to stare at a lady, for his education had not been got in places where ladies are often seen, or manners frequently discussed. But Beatrice did not seem at all disturbed by the scrutiny, though she was quite aware of its pertinacity. A woman who has beauty in any degree rarely resents the

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genuine and unconcealed admiration of the vulgar. On the contrary, as the young girl dismissed the men, she smiled graciously upon them both, and perhaps a little the more upon Ruggiero, though there was not much to choose.

Neither of them spoke as they descended the stairs of the hotel, and went out through the garden to the gate. When they were in the square beyond Ruggiero stopped. Sebastiano stood still also and looked at him.

'Does your heart ever jump and turn somersaults and get into your mouth, when you look at a woman, Bastianello?' he asked.

'No. Does yours?'

'Yes. Just now.'

'I saw her, too,' answered Sebastiano. 'It is true that she is very fresh and pretty, and un-

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commonly clean. Eh—the devil! If you like her, ask for her. The maid of a Marchesa is sure to have money and to be a respectable girl.'

Ruggiero was silent for a moment and looked at his brother with an odd expression, as though he were going to say something. Unfortunately for him, for Sebastiano, for the maid, for Beatrice, and for the Count of San Miniato, too, he said nothing. Instead, he produced half a cigar from his cap, and two sulphur matches, and incontinently began to smoke.

'It is lucky that both boats are engaged on the same day,' observed Sebastiano. 'The Greek will be pleased. He will play all the numbers at the lottery.'

'And get very drunk to-night,' added Ruggiero with contempt.

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'Of course. But he is a good padrone, everybody says, and does not cheat his men.'

'I hope not.'

By and by the two went down to the beach again, and Sebastiano looked about him for a crew. The Marchesa wanted four men in her boat, or even five, and Sebastiano picked out at once the Gull, the Son of the American, Black Rag—otherwise known as Saint Peter from his resemblance to the pictures of the Apostle as a fisherman—and the Deaf Man. The latter is a fellow of strange ways, who lost his hearing from falling into the water in winter when overheated, and who has almost lost the power of speech in consequence, but a good sailor withal, tough, untiring, and patient.

They all set to work with a good will, and

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before four o'clock that day the two boats were launched, ballasted and rigged, the sails were bent to the yards and the brasses polished, so that Ruggiero and Sebastiano went up to their respective masters to ask if there were any orders for the afternoon.

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CHAPTER IV

RUGGIERO found out before long that his master for the summer was eccentric in his habits, judging from the Sorrentine point of view in regard to order and punctuality. Ruggiero's experience of fine gentlemen was limited indeed, but he could not believe that they all behaved like San Miniato, whose temper was apparently as changeable as his tastes. Sometimes he went to bed at nine o'clock and rose at dawn. Sometimes on the other hand he got up at seven in the evening and went to bed by daylight. Sometimes everything Ruggiero did was right, and sometimes

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everything was wrong. There were days when the Count could not be induced to move from the Marchesa di Mola's terrace between noon and midnight or later, and again there were days when he went off in his boat in the morning and did not return until the last stragglers on the terrace of the hotel were ready to go to bed. He was irregular even in playing, which was after all his chief pastime. Possibly he knew of reasons why it should be good to gamble on one day and not upon another. Then he had his fits of amateur seamanship, when he would insist upon taking the tiller from Ruggiero's hand. The latter, on such occasions, remained perched upon the stern in case of an emergency. San Miniato was a thorough landsman and never understood why the wind always seemed to

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change, or die away, or do something unexpected so soon as he began to steer the boat. From time to time Ruggiero, by way of a mild hint, held up his palm to the breeze, but San Miniato did not know what the action meant. Ruggiero trimmed the sails to suit the course chosen by his master as well as possible, but straightway the boat was up in the wind again if she had been going free, or was falling off if the tacks were down and the sheets well aft. San Miniato was one of those men who seem quite incapable of doing anything sensible from the moment they leave the land till they touch it again, when their normal common sense returns, and they once more become human beings.

On the other hand nothing frightened him, though he could not swim a stroke. More than

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once Ruggiero allowed him almost to upset the boat in a squall, and more than once, when steering himself, and when there was a fresh breeze, drove her till the seas broke over the bows, and the green water came in over the lee gunwale —just to see whether the Count would change colour. In this, however, he was disappointed. San Miniato's temper might change and his tastes might be as variable as the moon, or the weather, but his face rarely expressed anything of what he felt, and if he felt anything at such times it was assuredly not fear. He had good qualities, and courage was one of them, if courage may be called a quality at all. Ruggiero was not at all sure that his new master liked the sea, and it is possible that the Count was not sure of the fact himself; but for the time, it suited him to sail as

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much as possible, because Beatrice Granmichele was fond of it, and would therefore amuse herself with excursions hither and thither during the summer. As her mother rarely accompanied her, San Miniato could not, according to the customs of the country, join her in her boat, and the next best thing was to keep one for himself and to be as often as possible alongside of her, and ready to go ashore with her if she took a fancy to land in some quiet spot.

The Marchesa di Mola, having quite made up her mind that her daughter should marry San Miniato, and being almost too indolent about minor matters to care for appearances, would have allowed the two to be together from morning till night under the very least shadow of a chaperon's supervision, if Beatrice herself had

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shown a greater inclination for San Miniato's society than she actually did. But Beatrice was the only one of the party who had arrived at no distinct determination in the matter. San Miniato attracted her, and was very well in his way, but that was all. Amidst the shoals of migratory Neapolitans with magnificent titles and slender purses, who appeared, disported themselves and disappeared again, at the summer resort, it was quite possible that one might be found with more to recommend him than San Miniato could boast. Most of them were livelier than he, and certainly all were noisier. Many of them had very bright black eyes, which Beatrice liked, and they were all dressed a little beyond the extreme of the fashion, a fact of which she was too young to understand the psychological value in judg-

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ing of men. Some of them sang very prettily, and San Miniato did not possess any similar accomplishment. Indeed, in the young girl's opinion, he approached dangerously near to being a 'serious' man, as the Italians express it, and but for his known love of gambling he might have seemed to her altogether too dull a personage to be thought of as a possible husband. It is not easy to define exactly what is meant in Italian by a 'serious' man. The word does not exactly translate the French equivalent, still less the English one. It means something in the nature of a Philistine with a little admixture of Ciceronism—pass the word—and a dash of Cato Censor to sour the whole—a delight to schoolmasterly spirits, a terror to lively damsels, the laughing-stock of the worldly wise and only just too wise

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to find a congenial atmosphere in the everyday world. However, as San Miniato just escaped the application of the adjective I have been trying to translate, it is enough to say that he was not exactly a 'serious man,' being excluded from that variety of the species by his passion for play, which was dominant, and by the incidents of his past history, which had not been dull.

It is true that a liking for cards and a reputation for success gained in former love affairs are not in any sense a substitute for the outward and attractive expressions of a genuine and present passion, but they are better than nothing when they serve to combat such a formidable imputation as that of 'seriousness.' Anything is better than that, and as Beatrice Granmichele was inclined to like the man without knowing why, she

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made the most of the few stories about him which reached her maiden ears, and of his taste for gaming, in order to render him interesting in her own eyes. He did, indeed, make more or less pretty speeches to her from time to time, of a cheerfully complimentary character when he had won money, of a gracefully melancholy nature when he had lost, but she was far too womanly not to miss something very essential in what he said and in his way of saying it. A woman may love flattery ever so much and have ever so strong a moral absorbent system with which to digest it; she does not hate banality the less. There is no such word as banality in the English tongue, but there might be, and if there were, it would mean that peculiarly tasteless and saltless nature of actions and speeches done and delivered by

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persons who are born dull, or who are mentally exhausted, or are absent-minded, or very shy, but who, in spite of natural or accidental disadvantages, are determined to make themselves agreeable. The standard of banality differs indeed for every woman, and with every woman for almost every hour of the day, and men of the world who husband their worldly resources are aware of the fact. Angelina at three in the afternoon, fresh from rest and luncheon—if both agree with her—is wreathed in smiles at a little speech of Edwin's which would taste like sweet camomile tea after dry champagne, at three in the morning, when the Hungarian music is ringing madly in her ears and there are only two more waltzes on the programme. Music, dancing, lights and heat are to a woman of the world what strong drinks are

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to a normal man; they may not intoxicate, but they change the humour. Fortunately for San Miniato the young lady whom he wished to marry was not just at present exposed to the action of those stimulants, and her moods were tolerably even. If he had been at all eloquent, the same style of eloquence would have done almost as well after dinner as after breakfast. But the secret springs of love speech were dried up in his brain by the haunting consciousness that much was expected of him. He had never before thought of marrying and had not yet in his life found himself for any length of time constantly face to face in conversation with a young girl, with limitations of propriety and the fear of failure before his eyes. The situation was new and uncomfortable. He felt like a man who has got

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a hat which does not belong to him, which does not fit him and which will not stay on his head in a high wind. The consequence was that his talk lacked interest, and that he often did not talk at all. Nevertheless, he managed to show enough assiduity to keep himself continually in the foreground of Beatrice's thoughts. Being almost constantly present she could not easily forget him, and he held his ground with a determination which kept other men away. When a man can make a woman think of him half-a-dozen times a day and can prevent other men from taking his place when he is beside her, he is in a fair way to success.

On a certain evening San Miniato had a final interview with the Marchesa di Mola in which he expressed all that he felt for Beatrice, includ-

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ing a little more, and in which he described his not very prosperous financial condition with mitigated frankness. The Marchesa listened dreamily in the darkness on the terrace while her daughter played soft dance music in the dimly lighted room behind her. Beatrice probably had an idea of what was going on outside, upon the terrace, and was trying to make up her own mind. She played waltzes very prettily, as women who dance well generally do, if they play at all.

When San Miniato had finished, the Marchesa was silent for a few seconds. Then she tapped her companion twice upon the arm with her fan, in a way which would have seemed lazy in any one else, but which, for her, was unusually energetic.

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'How well you say it all!' she exclaimed.

'And you consent, dear Marchesa?' asked the Count, with an eagerness not all feigned.

'You say it all so well! If I could say it half so well to Beatrice—there might be some possibility. But Beatrice is not like me—nor I like you—and so——'

She broke off in the middle of the sentence with an indolent little laugh.

'If she were like you,' said San Miniato, 'I would not hesitate long.'

There was an intonation in his voice that pleased the middle-aged woman, as he had intended.

'What would you do?' she asked, fanning herself slowly in the dark.

'I would speak to her myself.'

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'Heavens!' Again the Marchesa laughed. The idea seemed eccentric enough in her eyes.

'Why not?'

'Why not? Dearest San Miniato, do not try to make me argue such insane questions with you. You know how lazy I am. I can never talk.'

'A woman need not talk in order to be persuaded. It is enough that the man should. Let me try.'

'I will shut my ears.'

'I will kneel at your feet.'

'I shall go to sleep.'

'I could wake you.'

'How?'

'By telling you that I mean to speak to Donna Beatrice myself.'

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'Such an idea would wake the dead!'

'So much the better. They would hear me.'

'They would not help you, if they heard you,' observed the Marchesa.

'They could at least bear witness to the answer I should receive.'

'And suppose, dear friend, that the answer should not be what you wish, or expect—would you care to have witnesses, alive or dead?'

'Why should the answer be a negative?'

'Because,' replied the Marchesa, turning her face directly to his, 'because Beatrice is herself uncertain. You know well enough that no man should ever tell a woman he loves her until he is sure that she loves him. And that is not the only reason.'

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'Have you a better one?' asked San Miniato with a laugh.

'The impossibility of it all! Imagine, in our world, a man deliberately asking a young girl to marry him!'

San Miniato smiled, but the Marchesa could not see the expression of his face.

'We do not think it so impossible in Piedmont,' he answered quietly.

'I am surprised at that.' The lady's tone was rather cold.

'Are you? Why? We are less old-fashioned, that is all.'

'And is it really done in — in good families?'

'Often,' answered San Miniato, seeing his advantage and pressing it. 'I could give you

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many instances without difficulty, within the last few years.'

'The plan certainly saves the parents a great deal of trouble,' observed the Marchesa, lazily shutting her eyes and fanning herself again.

'And it places the decision of the most vital question in life in the hands of the two beings most concerned.'

San Miniato spoke rather sententiously, for he knew how to impress his companion and he meant to be impressive.

'No doubt,' answered the Marchesa. 'No doubt. But,' she continued, bringing up the time-honoured argument, 'the two young people most concerned are not always the people best able to judge of their own welfare.'

'Of course they are not,' assented San Miniato,

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readily enough, and abandoning the point which could be of no use to him. 'Of course not. But, dearest Marchesa, since you have judged for us—and there is no one else to judge—do you not think that you might leave the rest in my hands? The mere question to be asked, you know, in the hope of a final answer—the mere technicality of love-making, with which you can only be familiar from the woman's point of view, and not from the man's, as I am. Not that I have had much experience——'

'You?' laughed the Marchesa, touching his hand with her fan. 'You without much experience! But you are historical, dearest friend! Who does not know of your conquests?'

'I, at least, do not,' answered San Miniato with well-affected modesty. 'But that is not the

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question. Let us get back to it. This is my plan. The moon is full to-morrow and the weather is hot. We will all go in my boat to Tragara and dine on the rocks. It will be beautiful. Then after dinner we can walk about in the moonlight—slowly, not far from you, as at the end of this terrace. And while you are looking on I, in a low voice, will express my sincere feelings to Donna Beatrice, and ask the most important of all questions. Does not that please you? Is it not well combined?'

'But why must we take the trouble to go all the way to Capri? What sense is there in that?'

'Dearest Marchesa, you do not understand! Consider the surroundings, the moonlight, the water rippling against the rocks, the soft breeze

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—a little music, too, such as a pair of mandolins and a guitar, which we could send over—all these things are in my favour.'

'Why?' asked the Marchesa, not understanding in the least how he could attach so much value to things which seemed to her unappreciative mind to be perfectly indifferent. 'Besides,' she added, 'if you want to give a party, you can illuminate the garden of the hotel with Chinese lanterns. That would be much prettier than to picnic on uncomfortable rocks out in the sea with nothing but cold things to eat and only the moon for an illumination. I am sure Beatrice would like it much better.'

San Miniato laughed.

'What a prosaic person you are!' he exclaimed. 'Can you not imagine that a young

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girl's disposition may be softened by moonlight, mandolins and night breezes?'

'No. I never understood that. And after all if you want moonlight you can have it here. If it shines at Capri it will shine at Sorrento. At least it seems to me so.'

'No, dearest Marchesa,' answered San Miniato triumphantly. 'There you are mistaken.'

'About the moon?'

'Yes, about the moon. When it rises we do not see it here, on account of the mountains behind us.'

'But I have often seen the moon here, from this very place,' objected the Marchesa. 'I am sure it is not a week ago that I saw it. You do not mean to tell me that there are two moons, and that yours is different from mine!'

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'Very nearly. This at least I say. When the moon is full we can see it rise from Tragara, and we can not see it from this place.'

'How inexplicable nature is!' exclaimed the Marchesa fanning herself lazily. 'I will not try to understand the moon any more. It tires me. A lemonade, San Miniato—ring for a lemonade. I am utterly exhausted.'

'Shall I ask Donna Beatrice's opinion about Tragara?' inquired San Miniato rising.

'Oh yes! Anything—only do not argue with me. I cannot bear it. I suppose you will put me into that terrible boat and make me sit in it for hours and hours, until all my bones are broken, and then you will give me cold maccaroni and dry bread and warm wine and water, and the sailors will eat garlic, and it will be

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insufferable and you will call it divine. And of course Beatrice will be so wretched that she will not listen to a word you say, and will certainly refuse you without hesitation. A lemonade, San Miniato, for the love of heaven! My throat is parched with this talking.'

When the Marchesa had got what she wanted, San Miniato sat down beside Beatrice at the piano, in the sitting-room.

'Donna Beatrice gentilissima,' he began, 'will you deign to tell me whether you prefer the moon to Chinese lanterns, or Chinese lanterns to the moon?'

'To wear?' asked the young girl with a laugh.

'If you please, of course. Anything would be becoming to you—but I mean as a question of

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light. Would you prefer a dinner by moonlight on the rocks of Tragara with a couple of mandolins in the distance, or would you like better a party in the hotel gardens with an illumination of paper lanterns? It is a most important question, I assure you, and must be decided very quickly, because the moon is full to-morrow.'

'What a ridiculous question!' exclaimed Beatrice, laughing again.

'Why ridiculous?'

'Because you ought to know the answer well enough. Imagine comparing the moon with Chinese lanterns!'

'Your mother prefers the latter.'

'Oh, mamma—of course! She is so practical. She would prefer carriage lamps on the trees—gas if possible! When are we going to Tragara?

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Where is it? Which boat shall we take? Oh, it is too delightful! Can we not go to-night?'

'We can do anything which Donna Beatrice likes,' answered San Miniato. 'But if you will listen to me, I will explain why to-morrow would be better. In the first place, we have dined once this evening, so that we could not dine again.'

'We could call it supper,' suggested Beatrice.

'Of course we could, if we could eat it at all. But it is also ten o'clock, and we could not get to Tragara before one or two in the morning. Lastly, your mother would not go.'

'Will she go to-morrow?' asked Beatrice with sudden anxiety. 'Have you asked her?'

'She will go,' answered San Miniato confidently. 'We must make her comfortable. That is the principal thing.'

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'Yes. She shall have her maid and we must take a chair for her to sit in, and another to carry her, and two porters, and a lamp, and a table, and a servant to wait on her. And she will want champagne, well iced, and a carpet for her feet, and a screen to keep the wind from her, if there is any, and several more things which I shall remember. But I know all about it, for we once made a little excursion from Taormina and dined out of doors, and I know exactly what she wants.'

'Very well, she shall have everything,' said San Miniato smiling at the catalogue of the Marchesa's wants. 'If she will only go, we will do all we can.'

'When it is time, let the two porters come in here with the chair and take her away,' answered

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Beatrice. 'Dear mamma! She will be much too lazy to resist. What fun it will be!'

And everything was done as Beatrice had wished. San Miniato made a list of things absolutely indispensable to the Marchesa. The number of articles was about two hundred, and their bulk filled a boat which was despatched early in the following afternoon to be rowed over to Tragara and unloaded before the party arrived.

Ruggiero and his brother worked hard at the preparations, silent, untiring and efficient as usual, but delighted in their hearts at the prospect of something less monotonous than the daily sail or the daily row within sight of Sorrento. To men who have knocked about the sea for years, from Santa Cruz to Sebastopol, the daily life of a sailor on a little pleasure boat lacks

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interest, and if circumstances had been different Ruggiero would probably have shipped before now as boatswain on board one of the neat schooners which are yearly built at the Piano di Sorrento, to be sold with their cargoes of salt as soon as they reach Buenos Ayres. But Ruggiero had contracted that malady of the heart which had taken him to the chemist's for the first time in his life, and which materially hindered the formation of any plan by which he might be obliged to leave his present situation. Moreover, the disease showed no signs of yielding; on the contrary, the action of the vital organ concerned became more and more spasmodic and alarming, while its possessor grew daily leaner and more silent.

The last package had been taken down, the last of the score of articles which the Marchesa

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was sure to want with her in the sail boat before she reached the spot where the main cargo of comforts would be waiting; the last sandwich, the last box of sweetmeats, the iced lemonade, the wraps and the parasols were all stowed away in their places. Then San Miniato went to fetch the Marchesa, marshalling in his two porters with their chair between them.

'Dearest Marchesa,' said the Count, 'if you will give yourself the trouble to sit in this chair, I will promise that no further exertion shall be required of you.'

The Marchesa di Mola looked up with a glance of sleepy astonishment.

'And why in that chair, dearest friend? I am so comfortable here. And why have you brought those two men with you?'

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'Have you forgotten our dinner at Tragara?' asked San Miniato.

'Tragara!' gasped the Marchesa. 'You are not going to take me to Tragara! Good heavens! I am utterly exhausted! I shall die before we get to the boat.'

'Altro è parlar di morte—altro è morire,' laughed San Miniato, quoting the famous song. 'It is one thing to talk of death, it is quite another to die. Only this little favour, Marchesa gentilissima—to seat yourself in this chair. We will do the rest.'

'Without a hat? Just as I am? Impossible! Come in an hour—then I shall be ready. My maid, San Miniato—send for Teresina. Dio mio! I can never go! Go without us, dearest friend—go and dine on your hideous rocks

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and leave us the little comfort we need so much!'

But protestations were vain. Teresina appeared and fastened the hat of the period upon her mistress's head. The hat of the period chanced to be a one-sided monstrosity at that time, something between a cart wheel, an umbrella and a flower garden, depending for its stability upon the proper position of several solid skewers, apparently stuck through the head of the wearer. This headpiece having been adjusted, the Marchesa asked for a cigarette, lighted it and looked about her.

'It is really too much!' she exclaimed. 'Button my gloves, Teresina. I shall not go after all, not even to please you, dearest friend. What a place of torture this world is! How right we are

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to try and get a comfortable stall in the next! Go away, San Miniato. It is quite useless.'

But San Miniato knew what he was doing. With gentle strength he made her rise from her seat and placed her in the chair. The porters lifted their burden, settled the straps upon their shoulders, the man in front glanced back at the man behind, both nodded and marched away.

'This is too awful!' sighed the Marchesa, as she was carried out of the door of the sitting-room. 'How can you have the heart, dearest friend! An invalid like me! And I was supremely comfortable where I was.'

But at this point Beatrice appeared and joined the procession, radiant, fresh as a fragrant wood-flower, full of life as a young bird. Behind her came Teresina, the maid, necessary at every

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minute for the Marchesa's comfort, her pink young cheeks flushed with pleasure and her eyes sparkling with anticipation, fastening on her hat as she walked.

'I was never so happy in my life,' laughed Beatrice. 'And to think that you have really captured mamma in spite of herself! Oh, mamma, you will enjoy it so much! I promise you shall. There is iced champagne, and the foot warmer and the marrous glacés and the lamp and everything you like—and quails stuffed with truffles, besides. Now do be happy and let us enjoy ourselves!'

'But where are all these things?' asked the Marchesa. 'I shall believe when I see.'

'Everything is at Tragara already,' answered Beatrice tripping down the stairs beside her

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mother's chair. 'And we really will enjoy ourselves,' she added, turning her head with a bewitching smile, and looking back at San Miniato. 'What a general you are!'

'If you could convince the Minister of War of that undoubted fact, you would be conferring the greatest possible favour upon me,' said the Count. 'He would have no trouble in persuading me to return to the army as commander-in-chief, though I left the service as a captain.'

So they went down the long winding way cut through the soft tufo rock and found the boat waiting for them by the little landing. The Marchesa actually took the trouble to step on board instead of trusting herself to the strong arms of Ruggiero. Beatrice followed her. As she set her foot on the gunwale Ruggiero held

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up his hand towards her to help her. It was not the first time this duty had fallen to him, but she was more radiantly fresh to-day than he had ever seen her before, and the spasm that seemed to crush his heart for a moment was more violent than usual. His strong joints trembled at her light touch and his face turned white. She felt that his hand shook and she glanced at him when she stood in the boat.

'Are you ill, Ruggiero?' she asked, in a kindly tone.

'No, Excellency,' he answered, in a low voice that was far from steady, while the shadow of a despairing smile flickered over his features.

He put up his hand to help Teresina, the maid. She pressed it hard as she jumped down, and smiled with much intention at the handsome

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sailor. But she got no answer for her look, and he turned away and shoved the boat off the little stone pier. Bastianello was watching them both, and wishing himself in Ruggiero's place. But Ruggiero, as he believed, had loved the pretty Teresina first, and Ruggiero had the first right to win her if he could.

So the boat shot out upon the crisping water into the light afternoon breeze, and up went foresail and mainsail and jib, and away she went on the port tack, San Miniato steering and talking to Beatrice—which things are not to be done together with advantage — the Marchesa lying back in a cane rocking-chair and thinking of nothing, while Teresina held the parasol over her mistress's head and shot bright glances at the sailors forward. And Ruggiero and Bastianello

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sat side by side amidships looking out at the gleaming sea to windward.

'What hast thou?' asked Bastianello in a low voice.

'The pain,' answered his brother.

'Why let thyself be consumed by it? Ask her in marriage. The Marchesa will give her to thee.'

'Better to die! Thou dost not know all.'

'That may be,' said Bastianello with a sigh.

And he slowly began to fake down the slack of the main halyard on the thwart, twisting the coil slowly and thoughtfully as it grew under his broad hands, till the rope lay in a perfectly smooth disk beside him. But Ruggiero changed his position and gazed steadily at Beatrice's changing face while San Miniato talked to her.

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So the boat sped on and many of those on board misunderstood each other, and some did not understand themselves. But what was most clear to all before long was that San Miniato could not make love and steer his trick at the same time.

'Are we going to Castellamare?' asked Bastianello in a low voice as the boat fell off more and more under the count's careless steering.

Ruggiero started. For the first time in his life he had forgotten that he was at sea.

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CHAPTER V

SAN MINIATO did not possess that peculiar and common form of vanity which makes a man sensitive about doing badly what he has never learned to do at all. He laughed when Ruggiero advised him to luff a little, and he did as he was told. But Ruggiero came aft and perched himself on the stern in order to be at hand in case his master committed another flagrant breach of seamanship.

'You will certainly take us to the bottom of the bay instead of to Tragara,' observed the Marchesa languidly. 'But then at least my

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discomforts will be over for ever. Of course there is no lemonade on board. Teresina, I want lemonade.'

In an instant Bastianello produced a decanter out of a bucket of snow and brought it aft with a glass. The Marchesa smiled.

'You do things very well, dearest friend,' she said, and moistened her lips in the cold liquid.

'Donna Beatrice has had more to do with providing for your comfort than I,' answered the Count.

The Marchesa smiled lazily, sipped about a teaspoonful from the glass and handed it to her maid.

'Drink, Teresina,' she said. 'It will refresh you.'

The girl drank eagerly.

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'You see,' said the Marchesa, 'I can think of the comfort of others as well as of my own.'

San Miniato smiled politely and Beatrice laughed. Her laughter hurt the silent sailor perched behind her, as though a glass had been broken on his face. How could she be so gay when his heart was beating so hard for her? He drew his breath sharply and looked out to sea, as many a heart-broken man has looked across that fair water since woman first learned that men's hearts could break.

It was a wonderful afternoon. The sun was already low, rolling down to his western bath behind Capo Miseno, northernmost of all his daily plunges in the year; and as he sank, the colours he had painted on the hills at dawn returned behind him, richer and deeper and rarer

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for the heat he had given them all day. There, like a mass of fruit and flowers in a red gold bowl, Sorrento lay in the basin of the surrounding mountains, all gilded above and full of rich shadows below. Over all, the great Santangelo raised his misty head against the pale green eastern sky, gazing down at the life below, at the living land and the living sea, and remembering, perhaps, the silent days before life was, or looking forward to the night to come in which there will be no life left any more. For who shall tell me that the earth herself may not be a living, thinking, feeling being, on whose not unkindly bosom we wear out our little lives, but whose high loves are with the stars, beyond our sight, and her voice too deep and musical for ears used to our shrill human speech? Who shall say surely that she

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is not conscious of our presence, of some of our doings when we tear her breast and lay burdens upon her neck and plough up her fair skin with our hideous works, or when we touch her kindly and love her, and plant sweet flowers in soft places? Who shall know and teach us that the summer breeze is not her breath, the storm the sobbing of her passion, the rain her woman's tears —that she is not alive, loving and suffering, as we all have been, are, or would be, but greater than we as the star she loves somewhere is greater and stronger than herself? And we live upon her, and feed on her and all die and are taken back into her whence we came, wondering much of the truth that is hidden, learning perhaps at last the great secret she keeps so well. Her life, too, will end some day, her last blossom will have

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bloomed alone, her last tears will have fallen upon her own bosom, her last sob will have rent the air, and the beautiful earth will be dead for ever, borne on in the sweep of the race that will never end, borne along yet a few ages, till her sweet body turns to star-dust in the great emptiness of a night without morning.

But Ruggiero, plain strong man of the people, hard-handed sailor, was not thinking of any of these things as he sat in his narrow place on the stern behind his master, mechanically guiding the tiller in the latter's unconscious hand, while he gazed silently at Beatrice's face, now turned towards him in conversation, now half averted as she looked down or out to sea. Ruggiero listened, too, to the talk, though he did not understand all the fine words Beatrice and San Miniato used.

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If he had never been away from the coast, the probability is that he would have understood nothing at all; but in his long voyages he had been thrown with men of other parts of Italy and had picked up a smattering of what Neapolitans call Italian, to distinguish it from their own speech. Even as it was, the most part of what they said escaped him, because they seemed to think so very differently from him about simple matters, and to be so heartily amused at what seemed so dull to him. And he began to feel that the hurt he had was deep and not to be healed, while he reflected that he was undoubtedly mad, since he loved this lady so much while understanding her so little. The mere feeling that she could talk and take pleasure in talking beyond his comprehension wounded him, as a

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sensitive half-grown boy sometimes suffers real pain when his boyishness shows itself among men.

Why, for instance, did the young girl's cheek flush and her eyes sparkle, when San Miniato talked of Paris? Paris was in France. Ruggiero knew that. But he had often heard that it was not so big a place as London, where he had been. Therefore Beatrice must have some other reason for liking it. Most probably she loved a Frenchman, and Ruggiero hated Frenchmen with all his heart. Then they talked about the theatre and Beatrice was evidently interested. Ruggiero had once seen a puppet show and had not found it at all funny. The theatre was only a big puppet show, and he could pay for a seat there if he pleased; but he did not please, because he was sure that it would not amuse him to go.

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Why should Beatrice like the theatre? And she liked the races at Naples, too, and those at Paris much better. Why? Everybody knew that one horse could run faster than another, without trying it, but it could not matter a straw which of two, or twenty, got to the goal first. Horses were not boats. Now there was sense in a boat race, or a yacht race, or a steamer race. But a horse! He might be first to-day, and to-morrow if he had not enough to eat he might be last. Was a horse a Christian? You could not count upon him. And then they began to talk of love and Ruggiero's heart stood still, for that, at least, he could understand.

'Love!' laughed Beatrice, repeating the word. 'It always makes one laugh. Were you ever in love, mamma?'

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The Marchesa turned her head slowly, and lifted her sleepy eyes to look at her daughter, before she answered.

'No,' she said lazily. 'I was never in love. But you are far too young to talk of such things.'

'San Miniato says that love is for the young and friendship for the old.'

'Love,' said San Miniato, 'is a necessary evil, but it is also the greatest source of happiness.'

'What a fine phrase!' exclaimed Beatrice. 'You must be a professor in disguise.'

'A professor of love?' asked the Count with a very well executed look of tenderness which did not escape Ruggiero.

'Hush, for the love of heaven!' interposed the Marchesa. 'This is too dreadful!'

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'We were not talking of the love of heaven,' answered Beatrice mischievously.

'I was thinking at least of a love that could make any place a heaven,' said San Miniato, again helping his lack of originality with his eyes.

Ruggiero reflected that it would be but the affair of a second to unship the heavy brass tiller and bring it down once on the top of his master's skull. Once would be enough.

'Whose love?' asked Beatrice innocently.

San Miniato looked at her again, then turned away his eyes and sighed audibly.

'Well?' asked Beatrice. 'Will you answer. I do not understand that language. Whose love would make any place—Timbuctoo, for instance—a heaven for you?'

'Discretion is the only virtue a man ought to

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exhibit whenever he has a chance,' said San Miniato.

'Perhaps. But even that should be shown without ostentation.' Beatrice laughed. 'And you are decidedly ostentatious at the present moment. It would interest mamma and me very much to know the object of your affections.'

'Beatrice!' exclaimed the Marchesa with affected horror.

'Yes, mamma,' answered the young girl. 'Here I am. Do you want some more lemonade?'

'She is quite insufferable,' said the Marchesa to San Miniato, with a languid smile. 'But really, San Miniato carissimo, this conversation —a young girl——'

Ruggiero wondered what she found so obnoxious

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in the words that had been spoken. He also wondered how long it would take San Miniato to drown if he were dropped overboard in the wake of the boat.

'If that is your opinion of your daughter,' said the latter, 'we shall hardly agree. Now I maintain that Donna Beatrice is the contrary of insufferable—the most extreme of contraries. In the first place——'

'She is very pretty,' said Beatrice demurely.

'I was not going to say that,' laughed San Miniato.

'Ah? Then say something else.'

'I will. Donna Beatrice has two gifts, at least, which make it impossible that she should ever be insufferable, even when her beauty is gone.'

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'Dio mio!' ejaculated the young girl. 'The compliments are beginning in good earnest!'

'It was time,' said San Miniato, 'since your mother——'

'Dear Count,' interrupted Beatrice, 'do not talk any more about mamma. I am anxious to get at the compliments. Do pray let your indiscretion be as ostentatious as possible. I cannot wait another second.'

'No need of waiting,' answered San Miniato, again addressing himself to the Marchesa. 'Donna Beatrice has two great gifts. She is kind, and she has charm.'

There being no exact equivalent for the word 'charm' in the Italian language, San Miniato used the French. Ruggiero began to puzzle his brains, asking himself what this foreign virtue

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could be which his master estimated so highly. He also thought it very strange that Beatrice should have said of herself that she was pretty, and still stranger that San Miniato should not have said it.

'Is that all?' asked Beatrice. 'I need not have been in such a hurry to extract your compliments from you.'

'If you had understood what I said,' answered San Miniato unmoved, 'you would see that no man could say more of a woman.'

'Kind and charming! It is not much,' laughed the young girl. 'Unless you mean much more than you say—and I asked you to be indiscreet!'

'Kind hearts are rare enough in this world, Donna Beatrice, and as for charm——'

'What is charm?'

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'It is what the violet has, and the camelia has not——'

'Heavens! Are you going to sigh to me in the language of flowers?'

'Beatrice! Beatrice!' cried the Marchesa, with the same affectation of horror as before.

'Dear mamma, are you uncomfortable? Oh no! I see now. You are horrified. Have I said anything dreadful?' she asked, turning to San Miniato.

'Anything dreadful? What an idea! Really, Marchesa carissima, I was just beginning to explain to Donna Beatrice what charm is, when you cut me short. I implore you to let me go on with my explanation.'

'On condition that Beatrice makes no comments. Give me a cigarette, Teresina.'

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'The congregation will not interrupt the preacher before the benediction,' said Beatrice folding her small hands on her knee, and looking down with a devout expression.

'Charm,' began San Miniato, 'is the something which some women possess, and which holds the men who love them——'

'Only those who love them?' interrupted Beatrice, looking up quickly.

'I thought,' said the Marchesa, 'that you were not to give us any comments.' She dropped the words one or two at a time between the puffs of her cigarette.

'A question is not a comment, mamma. I ask for instruction.'

'Go on, dearest friend,' said her mother to the Count. 'She is incorrigible.'

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'On the contrary, Donna Beatrice fills my empty head with ideas. The question was to the point. All men feel the charm of such women as all men smell the orange blossoms here in May——'

'The language of flowers again!' laughed Beatrice.

'You are so like a flower,' answered San Miniato softly.

'Am I?' She laughed again, then grew grave and looked away.

Ruggiero's hand shook on the heavy tiller, and San Miniato, who supposed he was steering all the time, turned suddenly.

'What is the matter?' he asked.

'The rudder is draking, Excellency,' answered Ruggiero.

'And what does that mean?' asked Beatrice.

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'It means that the rudder trembles as the boat rises and falls with each sea, when there is a good breeze,' answered Ruggiero.

'Is there any danger?' asked Beatrice indifferently.

'What danger could there be, Excellency?' asked the sailor.

'Because you are so pale, Ruggiero. What is the matter with you, to-day?'

'Nothing, Excellency.'

'Ruggiero is in love,' laughed San Miniato. 'Is it not true, Ruggiero?'

But the sailor did not answer, though the hot blood came quickly to his face and stayed there a moment and then sank away again. He looked steadily at the dancing waves to windward, and set his lips tightly together.

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'I would like to ask that sailor what he thinks of love and charm, and all the rest of it,' said Beatrice. 'His ideas would be interesting.'

Ruggiero's blue eyes turned slowly upon her, with an odd expression. Then he looked away again.

'I will ask him,' said San Miniato in a low voice. 'Ruggiero!'

'Excellency!'

'We want to know what you think about love. What is the best quality a woman can have?'

'To be honest,' answered Ruggiero promptly.

'And after that, what next?'

'To be beautiful.'

'And then rich, I suppose?'

'It would be enough if she did not waste money.'

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'Honest, beautiful, and economical!' exclaimed Beatrice. 'He does not say anything about charm, you see. I think his description is extremely good and to the point. Bravo, Ruggiero!'

His eyes met hers and gleamed rather fiercely for an instant.

'And how about charm, Ruggiero?' asked Beatrice mischievously.

'I do not speak French, Excellency,' he answered.

'You should learn, because charm is a word one cannot say in Italian. I do not know how to say it in our language.'

'Let me talk about flowers to him,' said San Miniato. 'I will make him understand. Which do you like better, Ruggiero, camelias or violets?'

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'The camelia is a more lordly flower, Excellency, but for me I like the violets.'

'Why?'

'Who knows? They make one think of so many things, Excellency. One would tire of camelias, but one would never be tired of violets. They have something—who knows?'

'That is it, Ruggiero,' said San Miniato, delighted with the result of his experiment. 'And charm is the same thing in a woman. One is never tired of it, and yet it is not honesty, nor beauty, nor economy,'

'I understand, Excellency—è la femmina—it is the womanly.'

'Bravo, Ruggiero!' exclaimed Beatrice again. 'You are a man of heart. And if you found a woman who was honest and beautiful and econ-

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omical and "femmina," as you say, would you love her?'

'Yes, Excellency, very much,' answered Ruggiero. But his voice almost failed him.

'How much? Tell us.'

Ruggiero was silent a moment. Then his eyes flashed suddenly as he looked down at her and his voice came ringing and strong.

'So much that I would pray that Christ and the sea would take her, rather than that another man should get her! Per Dio!'

There was such a vibration of strong passion in the words that Beatrice started a little and San Miniato looked up in surprise. Even the Marchesa vouchsafed the sailor a glance of indolent curiosity. Beatrice bent over to the Count and spoke in a low tone and in French.

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'We must not tease him any more. He is in love and very much in earnest.'

'So am I,' answered San Miniato with a half successful attempt to seem emotional, which might have done well enough if it had not come after Ruggiero's heartfelt speech.

'You!' laughed Beatrice. 'You are never really in earnest. You only think you are, and that pleases you as well.'

San Miniato bit his lip, for he was not pleased. Her answer augured ill for the success of the plan he meant to put into execution that very evening. He felt strongly incensed against Ruggiero, too, without in the least understanding the reason.

'You will find out some day, Donna Beatrice, that those who are most in earnest are not those who make the most passionate speeches.'

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'Ah! Is that true? How strange! I should have supposed that if a man said nothing it was because he had nothing to say. But you have such novel theories!'

'Is this discussion never to end?' asked the Marchesa, wearily lifting her hand as though in protest, and letting it fall again beside the other.

'It has only just begun, mamma,' answered Beatrice cheerfully. 'When San Miniato jumps into the sea and drowns himself in despair, you will know that the discussion is over.'

'Beatrice! My child! What language!'

'Italian, mamma carissima. Italian with a little Sicilian, such as we speak.'

'I am at your service, Donna Beatrice,' said the Count. 'Would you like me to drown myself

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immediately, or are you inclined for a little more conversation?'

Ruggiero had now taken the helm altogether. As San Miniato spoke he nodded to his brother who was forward, intimating that he meant to go about. He was certainly not in his normal frame of mind, for he had an evil thought at that moment. Fortunately for every one concerned the breeze was very light and was indeed dying away as the sun sank lower. They were already nearing the southernmost point of Capri, commonly called by sailors the Monaco, for what reason no one knows. To reach Tragara where the Faraglioni, or needles, rise out of the deep sea close to the rocky shore under the cliffs, it is necessary to go round the point. There was soon hardly any breeze at all, so that Bastianello and

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the other men shipped half a dozen oars and began to row. The operation of going about involved a change of places in so small a boat and the slight confusion had interrupted the conversation. A long silence followed, broken at last by the Marchesa's voice.

'A cigarette, Teresina, and some more lemonade. Are you still there, San Miniato carissimo? As I heard no more conversation I supposed you had drowned yourself as you proposed to do.'

'Donna Beatrice is so kind as to put off the execution until after dinner.'

'And shall we ever reach this dreadful place, and ever really dine?' asked the Marchesa.

'Before sunset,' answered San Miniato. 'And we shall dine at our usual hour.'

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'At least it will not be so hot as in the hotel, and after all it has not been very fatiguing.'

'No,' said the Count, 'I fail to see how your exertions can have tired you much.'

Ruggiero looked down at his master and at the fine lady as she lay listlessly extended in her cane chair, and he felt that in his heart he hated them both as much as he loved Beatrice, which was saying much. But he wondered how it was that less than half an hour earlier he had been ready to upset the boat and drown every one in it indiscriminately. Nevertheless he believed that if there had been a stiff breeze just then, enough for his purpose, he would have stopped the boat's way, and then put the helm hard up again, without slacking out a single sheet, and he knew the little craft well enough to be sure of what

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would have happened. Murderous intentions enough, as he thought of it all now, in the calm water under the great cliff from which tradition says that Tiberius shot delinquents into space from a catapult.

The men pulled hard by the lonely rocks, for the sun had almost set and they knew how sharp the stones are at Tragara, when one must tread them barefoot and burdened with hampers and kettles and all the paraphernalia of a picnic.

Then the light grew rich and deep, and the sea swallows shot from the misty heights, like arrows, into the calm purple air below, and skimmed and wheeled, and rose again, startled by the splash of the oars and the dull knock of them as they swung in the tholes. And the water was like a mirror in which all manner of rare and

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lovely things are reflected, with blots of liquid gold and sheen of soft-hued damask, and great handfuls of pearls and opals strewn between, and roses and petals of many kinds of flowers without names. And the air was full of the faint, salt odours that haunt the lonely places of the sea, sweet and bitter at once as the last days of a young life fading fast. Then the great needles rose gigantic from the depths to heaven, and beyond, through the mysterious, shadowy arch that pierces one of them, was opened the glorious vision of a distant cloud-lit water, and a single dark sail far away stood still, as it were, on the very edge of the world.

Beatrice leaned back and gazed at the scene, and her delicate nostrils expanded as she breathed. There was less colour in her face than there had

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been, and the long lashes half veiled her eyes. San Miniato watched her narrowly.

'How beautiful! How beautiful!' she exclaimed twice, after a long silence.

'It will be more beautiful still when the moon rises,' said San Miniato. 'I am glad you are pleased.'

She liked the simple words better, perhaps, than some of his rather artificial speeches.

'Thank you,' she said. 'Thank you for bringing us here.'

He had certainly taken a great deal of trouble, she thought, and it was the least she could do, to thank him as she did. But she was really grateful and for a moment she felt a sort of sympathy for him which she had not felt before. He, at least, understood that one could like something

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better in the world than the eternal terrace of a hotel with its stiff orange trees, its ugly lanterns and its everlasting gossip and chatter. He, at least, was a little unlike all those other people, beginning with her own mother, who think of self first, comfort second, and of others once a month or so, in the most favourable cases. Yet she wondered a little about his past life, and whether he had ever spoken to any woman with that ringing passion she had heard in Ruggiero's voice, with that flashing look she had seen in the sailor's bright blue eyes. It would be good to be spoken to like that. It would be good to see the colour in a man's face change, and come and go, red and white like life and death. It would be supremely good to be loved once, madly, passionately, with body, heart and soul, to the very

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breaking of all three—to be held in strong arms, to be kissed half to death.

She stopped, conscious that her mother would certainly not approve such thoughts, and well aware in her girlish heart that she did not approve them in herself. And then she smiled faintly. The man of her waking vision was not like San Miniato. He was more like Ruggiero, the poor sailor, who sat perched on the stern close behind her. She smiled uneasily at the idea, and then she thought seriously of it for a moment. If such a man as Ruggiero appeared, not as a sailor, but as a man of her own world, would he not be a very lovable person, would he not turn the heads of the languid ladies on the terrace of the hotel at Sorrento? The thought annoyed her. Ruggiero, poor fellow, would have

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given his good right arm to know that such a possibility had even crossed her reflections. But it was not probable that he ever would know it, and he sat in his place, silent and unmoved, steering the boat to her destination, and thinking of her.

It was not dusk when the boat was alongside of the low jagged rocks which lie between the landward needle and the cliffs, making a sort of rough platform in which there are here and there smooth flat places worn by the waves and often full of dry salt for a day or two after a storm. There, to the Marchesa's inexpressible relief, the numberless objects inscribed in the catalogue of her comforts were already arranged, and she suffered herself to be lifted from the boat and carried ashore by Ruggiero and his brother, with-

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out once murmuring or complaining of fatigue—a truly wonderful triumph for San Miniato's generalship.

There was the table, the screen, and the lamp, the chairs and the carpet—all the necessary furniture for the Marchesa's dining-room. And there at her place stood an immaculate individual in an evening coat and a white tie, ready and anxious to do her bidding. She surveyed the preparations with more satisfaction than she generally showed at anything. Then all at once her face fell.

'Good heavens, San Miniato carissimo,' she cried, 'you have forgotten the red pepper! It is all over! I shall eat nothing! I shall die in this place!'.

'Pardon me, dearest Marchesa, I know your

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tastes. There is red pepper and also Tabasco on the table. Observe—here and here.'

The Marchesa's brow cleared.

'Forgive me, dear friend,' she said. 'I am so dependent on these little things! You are an angel, a general and a man of heart.'

'The man of your heart, I hope you mean to say,' answered San Miniato, looking at Beatrice.

'Of course—anything you like—you are delightful. But I am dropping with fatigue. Let me sit down.'

'You have forgotten nothing—not even the moon you promised me,' said Beatrice, gazing with clasped hands at the great yellow shield as it slowly rose above the far south-eastern hills.

'I will never forget anything you ask me,

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Donna Beatrice,' replied San Miniato in a low voice. Something told him that in the face of all nature's beauty, he must speak very simply, and he was right.

There is but one moment in the revolution of day and night which is more beautiful than the rising of the full moon at sunset, and that is the dawn on the water when the full moon is going down. To see the gathering dusk drink down the purple wine that dyes the air, the sea and the light clouds, until it is almost dark, and then to feel the darkness growing light again with the warm, yellow moon—to watch the jewels gathering on the velvet sea, and the sharp black cliffs turning to chiselled silver above you—to know that the whole night is to be but a softer day—to see how the love of the sun for the earth is

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one, and the love of the moon another—that is a moment for which one may give much and not be disappointed.

Beatrice Granmichele saw and felt what she had never seen or felt before, and the magic of Tragara held sway over her, as it does over the few who see it as she saw it. She turned slowly and glanced at San Miniato's face. The moonlight improved it, she thought. There seemed to be more vigour in the well-drawn lines, more strength in the forehead than she had noticed until now. She felt that she was in sympathy with him, and that the sympathy might be a lasting one. Then she turned quite round and faced the commonplace lamp with its pink shade, which stood on the dinner-table, and she experienced a disagreeable sensation. The Marchesa

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was slowly fanning herself, already seated at her place.

'If you are human beings, and not astronomers,' she said, 'we might perhaps dine.'

'I am very human, for my part,' said San Miniato, holding Beatrice's chair for her to sit down.

'There was really no use for the lamp, mamma,' she said, turning again to look at the moon. 'You see what an illumination we have! San Miniato has provided us with something better than a lamp.'

'San Miniato, my dear child, is a man of the highest genius. I always said so. But if you begin to talk of eating without a lamp, you may as well talk of abolishing civilisation.'

'I wish we could!' exclaimed Beatrice.

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'And so do I, with all my heart,' said San Miniato.

'Including baccarat and quinze?' inquired the Marchesa, lazily picking out the most delicate morsels from the cold fish on her plate.

'Including baccarat, quinze, the world, the flesh and the devil,' said San Miniato.

'Pray remember, dearest friend, that Beatrice is at the table,' observed the Marchesa, with indolent reproach in her voice.

'I do,' replied San Miniato. 'It is precisely for her sake that I would like to do away with the things I have named.'

'You might just leave a little of each for Sundays!' suggested the young girl.

'Beatrice!' exclaimed her mother.

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CHAPTER VI

WHILE the little party sat at table, the sailors gathered together at a distance among the rocks, and presently the strong red light of their fire shot up through the shadows, lending new contrasts to the scene. And there they slung their kettle on an oar and patiently waited for the water to boil, while the man known as the Gull, always cook in every crew in which he chanced to find himself, sat with the salt on one side of him and a big bundle of maccaroni on the other, prepared to begin operations at any moment.

Ruggiero stood a little apart, his back against

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a boulder, his arms crossed and his eyes fixed on Beatrice's face. His keen sight could distinguish the changing play of her expression as readily at that distance as though he had been standing beside her, and he tried to catch the words she spoke, listening with a sort of hurt envy to the little silvery laugh that now and then echoed across the open space and lost itself in the crannies of the rocks. It all hurt him, and yet for nothing in the world would he have turned away or shut his ears. More than once, too, the thoughts that had disturbed him while he was steering in the afternoon, came upon him with renewed and startling strength. He had in him some of that red old blood that does not stop for trifles such as life and death when the hour of passion burns, and the brain reels with overmastering love.

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And Bastianello was not in a much better case, though his was less hard to bear. The pretty Teresina had seated herself on a smooth rock in the moonlight, not far from the table, and as the dishes came back, the young sailor waited on her and served her with unrelaxed attention. Since Ruggiero would not take advantage of the situation, his brother saw no reason for not at least enjoying the pleasure of seeing the adorable Teresina eat and drink as it were from his hand. Why Ruggiero was so cold, and stood there against his rock, silent and glowering, Bastianello could not at all understand; nor had he any thought of taking an unfair advantage. Ruggiero was first and no one should interfere with him, or his love; but Bastianello, judging from what he felt himself, fancied that he might have given

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him some good advice. Teresina's cheeks flushed with pleasure and her eyes sparkled each time he brought her some dainty from the master's table, and she thanked him in the prettiest way imaginable, so that her voice reminded him of the singing of the yellow-beaked blackbird he kept in a cage at home—which was saying much, for the blackbird sang well and sweetly. But Bastianello only said each time that 'it was nothing,' and then stood silently waiting beside her till she should finish what she was eating and be ready for more. Teresina would doubtless have enjoyed a little conversation, and she looked up from time to time at the handsome sailor beside her, with a look of inquiry in her eyes, as though to ask why he said nothing. But Bastianello felt that he was on his honour,

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for he never doubted that the little maid was the cause of Ruggiero's disease of the heart and indeed of all that his brother evidently suffered, and he was too modest by nature to think that Teresina could prefer him to Ruggiero, who had always been the object of his own unbounded devotion and admiration. Presently, when there was nothing more to offer her, and the party at the table were lighting their cigarettes over their coffee, he went away and going up to Ruggiero drew him a little further aside from the group of sailors.

'I want to tell you something,' he began. 'You must not be as you are, a man like you.'

'How may that be?' asked Ruggiero, still looking towards the table, and not pleased at

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being dragged from his former post of observation.

'I will tell you. I have been serving her with food. You could have done that instead if you had wished. You could have talked to her, and she would have liked it. It is easy when a woman is sitting apart and a man brings her good food and wine—you could have spoken a word into her ear.'

Ruggiero was silent, but he slowly nodded twice, then shook his head.

'You do not say anything,' continued Bastianello, 'and you do wrong. What I tell you is true, and you cannot deny it. After all, we are men and they are women. Are they to speak first?'

'It is just,' answered Ruggiero laconically.

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'But then, per Dio, go and talk to her. Are you going to begin giving her the gold before you have spoken?'

From which question it will be clear to the unsophisticated foreigner that a regular series of presents in jewelry is the natural accompaniment of a well-to-do courtship in the south. The trinkets are called collectively 'the gold.'

Ruggiero did not find a ready answer to so strong an argument. Little guessing that his brother was almost as much in love with Teresina as he himself was with her mistress, he saw no reason for undeceiving him concerning his own feelings. Since Bastianello had discovered that he, Ruggiero, was suffering from an acute attack of the affections, it had become the latter's chief object to conceal the real truth. It was not so

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much that he dreaded the ridicule—he, a poor sailor—of being known to love a great lady's daughter; ridicule was not among the things he feared. But something far too subtle for him to define made him keep his secret to himself—an inborn, chivalrous, manly instinct, inherited through generations of peasants but surviving still, as the trace of gold in the ashes of a rich stuff that has had gilded threads in it.

'If I did begin with the gold,' he said at last, 'and if she would not have me when I spoke afterwards, she would give the gold back.'

'Of course she would. What do you take her for?' Bastianello asked the question almost angrily, for he loved Teresina and he resented the slightest imputation upon her fair dealing.

Ruggiero looked at him curiously, but was far

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too much preoccupied with his own thoughts to guess what the matter was. He turned away and went towards the fire where the Gull was already tasting a slippery string of the maccaroni to find out whether it were enough cooked. Bastianello shrugged his shoulders and followed him in silence. Before long they were all seated round the huge earthen dish, each armed with an iron fork in one hand and a ship biscuit in the other, with which to catch the drippings neatly, according to good manners, in conveying the full fork from the dish to the wide-opened mouth. By and by there was a sound of liquid gurgling from a demijohn as it was poured into the big jug, and the wine went round quickly from hand to hand, while those who waited for their turn munched their biscuits. Some one has said that

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great appetites, like great passions, are silent. Hardly a word was said until the wine was passed a second time with a ration of hard cheese and another biscuit. Then the tongues were unloosed and the strange, uncouth jests of the rough men circulated in an undertone, and now and then one of them suffered agonies in smothering a huge laugh, lest his mirth should disturb the 'excellencies' at their table. The latter, however, were otherwise engaged and paid little attention to the sailors.

The Marchesa di Mola, having eaten about six mouthfuls of twice that number of delicacies and having swallowed half a glass of champagne and a cup of coffee, was extended in her cane rocking-chair, with her back to the moon and her face to the lamp, trying to imagine herself in her com-

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fortable sitting-room at the hotel, or even in her own luxurious boudoir in her Sicilian home. The attempt was fairly successful, and the result was a passing taste of that self-satisfied beatitude which is the peculiar and enviable lot of very lazy people after dinner. She cared for nothing and she cared for nobody. San Miniato and Beatrice might sit over there by the water's edge, in the moonlight, and talk in low tones as long as they pleased. There were no tiresome people from the hotel to watch their proceedings, and nothing better could happen than that they should fall in love, be engaged and married forthwith. That was certainly not the way the Marchesa could have wished the courtship and marriage to develop and come to maturity, if there had been witnesses of the facts from amongst

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her near acquaintance. But since there was nobody to see, and since it was quite impossible that she should run after the pair when they chose to leave her side, resignation was the best policy, resignation without effort, without fatigue and without qualms. Moreover, San Miniato himself had told her that in some of the best families in the north of Italy it was considered permissible for a man to offer himself directly to a young lady, and San Miniato was undoubtedly familiar with the usages of the very best society. It was quite safe to trust to him.

San Miniato himself would have greatly preferred to leave the negotiations in the hands of the Marchesa and would have done so had he not known that she possessed no power whatever over Beatrice. But he saw that the Marchesa,

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however much she might desire the marriage, would never exert herself to influence her daughter. She was far too indolent, and at heart, perhaps, too indifferent, and she knew the value of money and especially of her own. San Miniato made up his mind that if he won at all, it must be upon his own merits and by his own efforts.

He had not found it hard to lead Beatrice away from the lamp when dinner was over, and after walking about on the rocks for a few minutes he proposed that they should sit down near the water, facing the moonlit sea. Beatrice sat upon a smooth projection and San Miniato placed himself at her feet, in such a position that he could look up into her face and talk to her without raising his voice.

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'So you are glad you came here, Donna Beatrice,' he said.

'Very glad,' she answered. 'It is something I have never seen before—something I shall never forget, as long as I live.'

'Nor I.'

'Have you a good memory?'

'For some things, not for others.'

'For what, for instance?'

'For those I love——'

'And a bad memory for those whom you have loved,' suggested Beatrice with a smile.

'Have you any reason for saying that?' asked San Miniato gravely. 'You know too little of me and my life to judge of either. I have not loved many, and I have remembered them well.'

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'How many? A dozen, more or less? Or twenty? Or a hundred?'

'Two. One is dead, and one has forgotten me.'

Beatrice was silent. It was admirably done, and for the first time he made her believe that he was in earnest. It had not been very hard for him either, for there was a foundation of truth in what he said. He had not always been a man without heart.

'It is much to have loved twice,' said the young girl at last, in a dreamy voice. She was thinking of what had passed through her mind that afternoon.

'It is much — but not enough. What has never been lived out, is never enough.'

'Perhaps—but who could love three times?'

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'Any man—and the third might be the best and the strongest, as well as the last.'

'To me it seems impossible.'

San Miniato had got his chance and he knew it. He was nervous and not sure of himself, for he knew very well that she had but a passing attraction for him, beyond the very solid inducement to marry her offered by her fortune. But he knew that the opportunity must not be lost, and he did not waste time. He spoke quietly, not wishing to risk a dramatic effect until he could count on his own rather slight histrionic powers.

'So it seems impossible to you, Donna Beatrice,' he said, in a musing tone. 'Well, I daresay it does. Many things must seem impossible to you which are rather startling facts to me. I am

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older than you, I am a man, and I have been a soldier. I have lived a life such as you cannot dream of—not worse perhaps than that of many another man, but certainly not better. And I am quite sure that if I gave you my history you would not understand four-fifths of it, and the other fifth would shock you. Of course it would —how could it be otherwise? How could you and I look at anything from quite the same point of view?'

'And yet we often agree,' said Beatrice, thoughtfully.

'Yes, we do. That is quite true. And that is because a certain sympathy exists between us. I feel that very much when I am with you, and that is one reason why I try to be with you as much as possible.'

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'You say that is one reason. Have you many others?' Beatrice tried to laugh a little, but she felt somehow that laughter was out of place and that a serious moment in her life had come at last, in which it would be wiser to be grave and to think well of what she was doing.

'One chief one, and many little ones,' answered San Miniato. 'You are good to me, you are young, you are fresh—you are gifted and unlike the others, and you have a rare charm such as I never met in any woman. Are those not all good reasons? Are they not enough?'

'If they were all true, they would be more than enough. Is the chief reason the last?'

'It is the last of all. I have not given it to you yet. Some things are better not said at all.'

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'They must be bad things,' answered Beatrice, with an air of innocence.

She was beginning to understand, at last, that he really intended to make her a declaration of love. It was unheard of, almost inconceivable. But there he was at her feet, looking very handsome in the moonlight, his face turned up to hers with an unmistakable look of devotion in its rather grave lines. His voice, too, had a new sound in it. Indifferent as he might be by daylight and in ordinary life, the magic of the place and scene affected him a little at the present moment. Perhaps a memory of other years, when his pulse had quickened and his voice had trembled oddly, just touched his heart now and it responded with a faint thrill. For a moment at least he forgot his sordid plan, and

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Beatrice's own personal attraction was upon him.

And she was very lovely as she sat there, looking down at him, with white folded hands, hatless in the warm night, her eyes full of the dancing rays that trembled upon the softly rippling water.

'If they are not bad things,' she said, speaking again, 'why do you not tell them to me?'

'You would laugh.'

'I have laughed enough to-night. Tell me!'

'Tell you! Yes—that is easy to do. But it would be so hard to make you understand! It is the difference between a word and a thought, between belief and mere show, between truth and hearsay—more than that—much more than I can

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tell you. It means so much to me—it may mean so little to you, when I have said it!'

'But if you do not say it, how can I guess it, or try to understand it?'

'Would you try? Would you?'

'Yes.'

Her voice was soft, gentle, persuasive. She felt something she had never felt, and it must be love, she thought. She had always liked him a little better than the rest. But surely, this was more than mere liking. She had a strange longing to hear him say the words, to start, as her instinct told her she must, when he spoke them, to be told for the first time that she was loved. Is it strange, after all? Young, imaginative and full of life, she had been brought up to believe that she was to be married to some man she

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scarcely knew, after a week's acquaintance, without so much as having talked five minutes with him alone; she had been taught that love was a legend and matrimony a matter of interest. And yet here was the man whom her mother undoubtedly wished her to marry, not only talking with her as they had often talked before, with no one to hear what was said, but actually on the verge of telling her that he loved her. Could anything be more delicious, more original, more in harmony with the place and hour? And as if all this were not enough, she really felt the touch and thrill of love in her own heart, and the leaping wonder to know what was to come.

She had told him to speak and she waited for his voice. He, on his part, knew that much was at stake, for he saw that she was moved, and that

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all depended on his words. The fewer the better, he thought, if only there could be a note of passion in them, if only one of them could ring as all of poor Ruggiero's had rung when he had spoken that afternoon. He hesitated and hesitation would be fatal if it lasted another five seconds. He grew desperate. Where were the words and the tone that had broken down the will of other women, far harder to please than this mere child? He felt everything at once, except love. He saw her fortune slipping from him at the very moment of getting it, he felt a little contempt for the part he was playing and a sovereign scorn for his own imbecility, he even anticipated the Marchesa's languid but cutting comments on his failure. One second more, and all was lost—but not a word would come. Then,

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in sheer despair and with a violence that betrayed it, he seized one of Beatrice's hands in both of his and kissed it madly a score of times. As she interpreted the action, no eloquence of words could have told her more of what she wished to hear. It was unexpected, it was passionate; if it had been premeditated, it would have been a stroke of genius. As it was, it was a stroke of luck for San Miniato. With the true gambler's instinct he saw that he was winning and his hesitation disappeared. His voice trembled passionately now with excitement, if not with love—but it was the same to Beatrice, who heard the quick-spoken words that followed, and drank them in as a thirsty man swallows the first draught of wine he can lay hands on, be it ever so acid.

At the first moment she had been startled and

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had almost uttered a short cry, half of delight and half of fear. But she had no wish to alarm her mother and the quick thought stifled her voice. She tried to withdraw her hand, but he held it tightly in his own which were cold as ice, and she sat still listening to all he said.

'Ah, Beatrice!' he was saying, 'you have given me back life itself! Can you guess what I have lived through in these days? Can you imagine how I have thought of you and suffered day and night, and said to myself that I should never have your love? Can you dream what it must be to a man like me, lonely, friendless, half heart-broken, to find the one jewel worth living for, the one light worth seeking, the one woman worth loving—and then to long for her almost without hope, and so long? It is long, too. Who

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counts the days or the weeks when he loves? It is as though we had loved from the beginning of our lives! Can you or I imagine what it all was like before we met? I cannot remember that past time. I had no life before it—it is all forgotten, all gone, all buried and forever. You have made everything new to me, new and beautiful and full of light—ah, Beatrice! How I love you!'

Rather a long speech at such a moment, an older woman would have thought, and not over original in choice of similes and epithets, but fluent enough and good enough to serve the purpose and to turn the current of Beatrice's girlish life. Yet not much of a love-speech. Ruggiero's had been better, as a little true steel is better than much iron at certain moments in life. It succeeded very well at the moment, but its ulti-

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mate success would have been surer if it had reached no ears but Beatrice's. Neither she nor San Miniato were aware that a few feet below them a man was lying on his back, with white face and clenched hands, staring at the pale moonlit sky above him, and listening in stony despair to every word that was spoken.

The sight would have disturbed them, had they seen it, though they both were fearless by nature and not easily startled. Had Beatrice seen Ruggiero at that moment, she would have learned once and for ever the difference between real passion and its counterfeit. But Ruggiero knew where he was and had no intention of betraying himself by voice or movement. He suffered almost all that a man can suffer by the heart alone, but he was strong and could bear torture.

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The hardest of all was that he understood the real truth, partly by instinct and partly through what he knew of his master. Those rough southern sailors sometimes have a wonderful keenness in discovering the meaning of their masters' doings. Ruggiero held the key to the situation. He knew that San Miniato was poor and that the Marchesa was very rich. He knew very well that San Miniato was not at all in love, for he knew what love really meant, and he could see how the Count always acted by calculation and never from impulse. Best of all he saw that Beatrice was a mere child who was being deceived by the coolly assumed passion of a veteran woman-killer. It was bitterly hard to bear. And he had felt a foreboding of it all in the afternoon—and he wished that he had risked

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all and brought down the brass tiller on San Miniato's head and submitted to be sent to the galleys for life. He could never have forgotten Beatrice; but San Miniato could never have married her, and that satisfaction would have made chains light and hard labour a pastime.

It was too late to think of such things now. Had he yielded to the first murderous impulse, it would have been better. But he had never struck a man from behind and he knew that he could not do it in cold blood. Yet how much better it would have been! He would not be lying now on the rock, holding his breath and clenching his fists, listening to his Excellency the Count of San Miniato's love-making. By this time the Count of San Miniato would be cold, and he, Ruggiero, would be handcuffed and locked up in the little

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barrack of the gendarmes at Sorrento, and Beatrice with her mother would be recovering from their fright as best they could in the rooms at the hotel, and Teresina would be crying, and Bastianello would be sitting at the door of his brother's prison waiting to see what happened and ready to do what he could. Truly all this would have been much better! But the moment had passed and he must lie on his rock in silence, bound hand and foot by the necessity of hiding himself, and giving his heart to be torn to pieces by San Miniato's aristocratic fine gentleman's hands, and burned through and through by Beatrice's gentle words.

'And so you really love me?' said San Miniato, sure at last of his victory.

'Do you doubt it, after what I have done?'

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asked Beatrice in a very soft voice. 'Did I not leave my hand in yours when you took it so roughly and—you know——'

'When I kissed it—but I want the words, too —only once, from your beautiful lips——'

'The words——' Beatrice hesitated. They were too new to her lips, and a soft blush rose in her cheeks, visible even in the moonlight.

Ruggiero's heart stood still—not for the first time that day. Would she speak the three syllables or not?

As for San Miniato, his excitement had cooled, and he threw all the tenderness he could muster into his last request, with instinctive tact returning to the more quiet tone he had used at the beginning of the conversation.

'I ask you, Beatrice mia, to say—' he paused,

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to give the proper effect in the right place—'I love you,' he said, completing the sentence very musically and looking up most tenderly into her eyes.

She sighed, blushed again, and turned her head away. Then quite suddenly she looked at him once more, pressed his hand nervously and spoke.

'I love you, carissimo,' she said, and rose at the same moment from her seat. 'Come—it is time. Mamma will be tired,' she added, while he held her hand and pressed it to his lips.

Her confusion had made it easy for him. He would have had difficulty in ending the scene artistically if she had not unconsciously helped him.

Ruggiero clenched his hands a little tighter and tried not to breathe.

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'It is a lie,' he said in his heart, but his lips never moved, nor did he stir a limb as he listened to the departing footsteps on the ledge above.

Then with the ease of great strength he drew himself along through cranny and hollow till he was far from where they sat, and had reached the place where the boats were made fast. It would seem natural to every one that he should suddenly be standing there to see that all was right, and that none of the moorings had slipped or chafed against the jagged rocks. There he stood, gazing at the rippling water, at the tall yards as they slowly crossed and recrossed the face of the moon, with the rocking of the boats, at the cliffs to the right and left, at the dim headland of the Campanella, at all the sights long familiar to him—seeing none of them and yet

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feeling that they at least were his own people, that they understood him and knew what he felt —what he had no words with which to tell anyone, if he had wished to tell it.

For he who loves and is little loved, or not at all, has no friend, be he of high estate or low, beyond nature, the deep-bosomed, the bountiful, the true; and on her he may lean, trusting, and know that he will not be betrayed. And in time her language will be his. But she will be heard alone when she speaks with him, and without rival, with the full right of a woman who gives all her love and asks for a man's soul in return, recking little of all the world besides. But not all know how kind she is, how merciful and how sweet. For she does not heal broken hearts. She takes them as they are into her own, with all the

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memory and all the sin, perhaps, and all the bitter sorrow which is the reward of faith and faithlessness alike. She takes them all, and holds them kindly in her own breast, as she has taken the torn limbs of martyred saints and tortured sinners and has softly turned them all into a fragrant dust. And though the ashes of the heart be very bitter, they are after all but dust, which cannot feel of itself any more. Yet there may be something left behind, in the place where it lived and was broken and died, which is not wholly bad, though there be little good in this earth where there is no heart.

Moreover, nature is a silent mistress to all but those who love her, and she tells no tales as men and women do, and forgets none of the secrets which are told to her, for they are our treasures—treasures of love and of hate, of sweetness and of

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poison, which we lay up in her keeping when we are alone with her, sure that we shall find again all we have given up if we require it of her. But as the years blossom, bloom, and fade in their quick succession, the day will come when we shall ask of her only the balm and be glad to leave the poison hidden, and to forget how we would have used it in old days—when we shall ask her only to give us the memory of a dear and gentle hand —dear still but no longer kind—of the voice that was once a harmony, and whose harsh discord is almost music still—of the hour when love was twofold, stainless and supreme. Those things we shall ask of her and she, in her wonderful tenderness, will give them to us again—in dreams, waking or sleeping, in the sunlit silence of lonely places, in soft nights when the southern sea is

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still, in the greater loneliness of the storm, when brave faces are set as stone and freezing hands grasp frozen ropes, and the shadow of death rises from the waves and stands between every man and his fellows. We shall ask, and we shall receive. Out of noonday shadow, out of the starlit dusk, out of the driving spray of the mid-tempest, one face will rise, one hand will touch our own, one loving, lingering glance will meet ours from eyes that have no look of love for us in them now. These things our lady nature will give us of all those we have given her. But of the others, we shall not ask for them, and she will mercifully forget for us the bitterness of their birth, and life, and death.

END OF VOL. I

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